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Major Weir

CHAPTER I

A HORSLMAN FROM THE SOUTH

“but more especially enlarge us from the vice of hypocrisy, that subtle and very damnable sin which, like the leprosy of old, causes, to the house and garment of him in whom the foul plague is, to be utterly accursed. Thou who maketh a hornbook of the hearts of men, cry aloud, and spare not, ‘Unclean, Unclean!’ over such a one who hath taken to himself the garment of imputed righteousness. Rend his filthy rag from him. Make him known in the sight of those he hath deceived. Make him known to himself, that, cast forth without the camp, he may repent”—

“Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!”

The sudden unseemly laughter sounded strangely under the dark ceiling-beams of a chamber of the house in the West Bow. Yet few of the heads decorously bowed by the standing group of worshippers in sad-coloured raiment were lifted, the interruption was received with the calm of custom, as a tall grey-haired woman broke from the circle, twisting her body to and fro in her ill-timed merriment.

“Lord, grant the prayer!” she cried, and “Lord, grant the prayer!”

The leader of the exercise seemed as well accustomed as his congregation to the interlude. He had paused at the first cachinnation where he stood in the midst of his circle, leaning slightly forward on a black staff,

grasped in his left hand, while with the right he covered his eyes. Now, as the woman, exhausted by her paroxysm, let her head fall against the oaken wainscoting, his voice, mellow and of a singular expressiveness, stole again through the gathering dusk—

"For this Thy handmaiden, so sorely afflicted of Thee, we beseech Thee! Cast out the ill spirit that rendeth her by times. Clothe her in her right mind if it be Thy will, and if not, grant to him on whom Thou hast bound this heavy burden, strength to bear it for Thy glory"—

The voice stopped short, with a tremor the more pathetic for being instantly suppressed. For an instant the raised right hand maintained position, then it fell, eyes of a humid hazel, set in a florid countenance, looked out on the group breaking into motion beside him, eyes that turned from face to face as though gleaning a harvest of sympathy ripe there for him. The next moment the tall dark man had bent with a kindness of manner to listen to the words with which a little middle-aged woman had pressed forward, catching at the hand that held the staff.

"Major Weir," she cried, "the prayers which ye pray in the ears o' all men are going up before ye! It's no for nothing your bye-name in Enibro' is 'Angelical Thomas,' for an angel o' consolation are ye to those who have the privilege o' hearing ye! The Master whose bidding ye do from your uprising to your down-sitting, will requite ye, even to such a chariot of fire"—

She broke off with a little cry. The carving of the staff, on which in her feminine enthusiasm she had tightened an unconscious grasp, had bruised her, an angry mark showed red on the flesh of the trespassing fingers.

Major Weir seemed not at all to regard the scathe done on his admirer. His eyes looked over the heads about him to the figure now standing straight and stark against the wainscoting.

The grey-haired woman had sloughed, as it were,

all traces of her hysterical outburst, a fierce dignity indeed pervading the lines of the form to which the brown dusk appeared to lend a supernatural height. Eyes of the Weir hazel, weirdly intent on nothingness, looked beyond the faces turned towards her, while the breast under the severely plaited kerchief heaved with the flying breath, and a fear grew on the countenance of the woman who looked into the Kingdom of the Mirk. But to the bystanders nearest the most startling circumstance was, that on the forehead, half-hidden by the mutch, a mysterious mark showed plain, the wrinkles of the brows knitted in the straining look forming into strange lines.

The man, who with the others had stood silently at gaze, was the first to shake off the fascination of fear. He spoke suddenly, stepping forward in front of the braced figure—

“Friends, my sister Grizel’s fits are upon her. I know not if it be a stirring of vain pride in me, but I own I had liefer wrestle alone through the dark hour which she and I must dree.”

The sound of his voice appeared to pierce through the woman’s trance, she began to speak, thickly and slowly, as though spelling from a book strange to her. Major Weir cast a furtive glance back as he plunged into the group, speaking farewells and benedictions with a fervour that drowned the muttering tones.

But as the door fell from his hand behind the last godly visitor, the hoarse tones had won free. With the mien of a prophetess, the woman stood up on the floor, one out-stretched hand levelled at the man whose dark face had grown pale—

“A chariot of fire! A chariot of fire! A chariot of fire!”

“A crowd in the Grassmarket, and you and I in the midst of it, brother! A wind fresh from the Firth, and the little flames dance bravely with it! The low rises up redly, and the folk fall back on all sides to give the godly Major place! They are fleeching at you to pray,

brother, but you shake your head, though the plants o' grace from the Bowhead are met together, Major Weir will not lead in prayer !

"A horseman rides up from the South, and Death sits the crupper ahint him ! Innocent feet before now have climbed up the stair, though never down, but in the hour that the foot that comes frees the threshold, your shroud, a shroud of flame, about your feet !"

The hoarse voice had grown high and clear, the last words rang echoing through the chamber. As though awakened by her own clamour, the woman trembled violently, dropping the outstretched arm at her side. The seeing look faded from her eyes, the mark smoothed itself from her forehead.

With measured steps Major Weir gathered himself to advance, pointing the black staff towards his sister. At his aspect a shudder shook the relaxed limbs, back and farther back the woman Grizel cowered against the wainscoting, stretching out both hands as though to ward off something which she feared.

Inexorable as the turning tide the slow steps advanced. Her body flattened against the woodwork, Grizel was sliding along the wall, her wide eyes fixed on the end of the ebony wand.

Cowering, shrinking, the cringing creature edged herself into a corner, and too late knew her mistake.

Her hunter stood in front of her, inch by inch nearing the staff towards her, banning her, paralysed, to the spot.

The rod was not a finger-breadth from her face when the strange couple started apart. A knocking of a vigorous impatience had risen up through the twilight from the door below, lustily prolonged as an answer tarried. With the propriety of demeanour that through the whole strange scene had not yielded for an instant, Major Weir lowered the staff to the ground, and made ready to obey the summons.

The gloaming was thick on the stairway descended by the sedate feet and the tapping staff, but a flood of light fell on the man as he at last unbarred the house-door. A clear shining in the west had triumphed.

over a day-long of rain, as it triumphed over the dusk that did duty for daylight in the grim close and court of the Weir "land" in the West Bow. The blaze of daffodil brightness dazzled Major Weir's eyes, it was a moment before he could discern the messenger, mud-splashed to the tops of his thigh-boots, who had knocked so long.

"I was bidden bring this letter to your hand, if ye are Major Weir!"

A packet was thrust against the hand that held the half-open door. The evening light had not blinded the horseman's eyes, he obviously was in haste to escape the hospitalities of a house which by the look of it promised more psalm-singing than porridge, and the importunities of a host whose plain dress and rigid bearing denied likelihood of "a wet evening" to be enjoyed from cellar of his.

"Stay, friend, from whom comest thou?"

"The letter will be saying, doubtless," responded the fellow, already half-way across the court. The light without the house was still clear to read by, the script on the parchment showed plain as the man on the threshold let his eyes fall upon it, conning half-aloud the words written—

"To Major Weir of the Covenanters, in Edinburgh, these!"

The writing inside the packet was not so clear. The wavering characters showed fugitive and blotted, as though the writer had written in haste when and where she best might.

"My father's friend!" The man stood out bare-headed under the evening sky, as the words on the uppermost crease grew plain to him.

"The word of the faling on sleep of your frend and my father, some two-three months back, will maybe have won to ye and maybe no, syne news travells slowly in the Lammermuirs. His death has left her who rites the porer by all she had to love on erth and the richer by his monnare-bags, fowl fall them! For, sir, every man-jack

of the Hopes is at daggers drawn as to who sall have the weddin' o' me, and I am forfaughten wi' wi'standin' o' them, lest the clan should make a flittin' o't wi' me, and bargane me away among themselves to the highest bidder. Now, sir, havin' more times than a few heard my father tell of how chief him and you were wont to be in your yowth, going forth to make warre on the Irishe Papishes, and in later times having much godly comunyon and sollace together, it is my most earnest prayer and petishun that ye will help me at my need, even to fetchin' me yourself to Embro', where I may bide till the sent of my tocher is out of my lovers' nostralls. I would in no wyse be chargeable to you, and indeed will order myself in your household as sobber as pussy, for such woornings of all sorts have falen to my lapp these weeks of my pore face and the gold chinking at my tail, that it is my highest hope to live and dye unwed as the Pope of Rome. Only for your dead friend's sake spare not to come to his sair pressed dochter,

"Chrystal Hope"

"Given this twelfth day of May att Clear Havens near the Lammerlaw"

Major Weir read the sheet through, holding up the parchment towards the end of it to catch the waning light. Once, twice, he read it, yet for a moment or so after lingered, his lips moving in some strange arithmetic or balance of chances, before at last he stepped back into the house, climbing the stair to the chamber in the rear of the building.

There the aspect had been altered. Wax-lights to lavish profusion hung in heavy brazen sconces against the dark wood of the walls, and a table ordered for supper further relieved the gloom with its white napery. The light made visible a singular feature hitherto blotted from notice by the crowding of the assembly—a chalk-line down the exact centre of the room bisecting doorway and hearth-place with a rigorous division. In the one half of the space thus oddly partitioned, the woman Grizel sate in the

chimney-ingle, spinning with a haste and skill under which her shuttle frolicked like a live thing on the floor

She neither looked nor spoke as her brother entered and seated himself at the end of the table projecting into the other half of the apartment, like a man hungered and in haste. The savouriness of collops and the smack of French wine were wasted on an appetite that plainly ate to live, the down-dropped eyes evidently seeing nothing of the platter on which his gaze fastened in the intentness of an absorbing thought

The thought seemed to have reached its climax when the man rose to his feet, moving about the chamber with his staid step. Not a glance had been vouchsafed him by the spinner near the reddening logs, but as he strode in and out, his steps sounding now here, now there, through the silent house, each movement was interpreted to the ears watching

"Yon's the skreigh o' the hinges o' the closet where he keeps his mails. He'll be for going on a journey!"

"He is in his riding-boots already. He'll have business in the town then, for it's ower late to pass the gates to-night."

"'Tis political work that he'll have on hand, for it's early in the night yet to be *about his own*!"

"By the opening o' his pistol-case, he'll no' come back, but he'll ride with the dawn."

The sentences hushed on the whispering lips as the subject of them re-entered the chamber. Throwing back the envelope of his long black cloak, he stooped to lay hold of the tongs chained to the side of the hearth, raising with them a certain board to the left of the hearth-stone.

The chunk of gold was heard in the parcel wrapped in rag, over which Major Weir pored for some moments, before bestowing part of the contents in an inside pouch. He proceeded to produce a phial, anointing the rag with the contents thereof before restoring it to its hiding-place under the board, which he replaced.

Throughout he had knelt with his back to the fire-glow, availing himself of his great cloak to keep the cavity in shadow

His steps thrilled the silence for a few seconds, as he descended the stairs and passed out into the night. Little by little the rats and mice took courage and leave of fiolic, scampering back and fro over the floors, that creaked through the night as if others beside the mice and rats had returned to the chambers where they had lived out the space of days. The outer door hung ajar the night through, as was habit in the house where midnight comings and goings were fashion, more than was known in Embro' town-talk.

The master of the house had left the perverseness of the West Bow behind, and was stepping eastward with his steady gait. The unsavoury smells of a town where the human life lay as close ranged as heirings in a barrel, daunted the freshness of the rain-washed night, the oil-lamps of the tall, gabled houses ramparting both sides of the High Street threw bewildering shadow-play on the tripe and whelk booths, which projected far out from beneath the pillared piazzas that lent them an appearance of stability. A miserable, flaunting creature dived under such a piazza at the oncoming of Major Weir's steps, divining from the stern, rigid demeanour that a ride on the wooden horse by the Guardhouse, or a "drookin'" in the Nor' Loch, would be his lightest word for her, but though a swift glance flickered out from the down-dropped eyelids, Major Weir did not linger in his going. The shadows of the crow-stepped gables of the Lawnmarket had been left behind when he biddled his steps in front of a haggard mass of masonry standing full on the causeway, and threw an imperious sign to the sentry with the Lochaber axe on the shoulder of his rust-red uniform.

Lighted by the torch which the fellow hastened to kindle, Weir knocked at the door of the pepper-box turret nearest the great church that loomed through the darkness farther back. The door creaked open, closing again behind him as he set foot on a

flight of stone steps, and directed himself on the gloomy fortalice of the Old Tolbooth

An odour of creatures caged rose up about the man entering with the careless step of the master, but Major Weir, admitted at the inner door, lacked the tang of novelty to make nostrils squeamish. Preceded by the Peter with the keys, he strode through the great hall, Hades of the anxious-eyed prisoners wont to pace away through its length and breadth their waiting-time for trial, and passed through a door to the right of the old pulpit that had in its day vibrated under John Knox's declamations. The visitor's unyielding countenance presented itself at the entrance of a cell occupied by a single prisoner.

The clang of the plate-iron grate falling to interrupted the occupant in his employment of writing upon a window-pane with the diamond in a ring. His courteous inclination held something of the unconscious condescension of the man of rank to a inferior, but Weir's steeple-crown remained on his head as he advanced, stealing his dark look at the other.

"So, James Grahame, the word of the Lord hath gone out against you!" he remarked.

The gentleman standing over against him lifted grey eyes in an attractive smile.

"Not against, but towards, Master Weir!" he corrected with a certain gaiety. "Our house counts honour to it that those of its blood have been privileged to show loyalty to the death on Flodden-field and on the day of Falkirk, but that I should have been accounted worthy by the King of kings to die in His quarrel is the greatest glory that is like to accrue to the name of Montrose!"

"Savoury meat for pride that one who bears that haughty name shall find a grave in the crops of corbies!" came the evil answer. "A felon's death, that head with its vain crispings set aloft on the gavel without, and your quarters gibbeted abroad for those of a traitor, is the end decreed by the Parliament for him whom the Malignants term their Great Marquess!"

The gentleman smiled, tossing back his long chestnut locks

"Nay, good master-jailor, though I profess that it better beseems those who gave forth such sentence rather to be hangmen than me to be hanged," said he, "still, at the risk of my carriage appearing stubborn, needs must that I swear on the faith of a Cavalier and a Christian that I think it greater honour to have my head on the port of this town for this quarrel than to have my picture in the King's bedchamber! I am indeed beholden to my judges that, lest the loyalty of Montrose should be forgotten, they should have appointed the five chiefest towns in broad Scotland to bear witness of it. As for that being the end of James Grahame, this glass gives token of the creed which, in my poor way, I was diverting myself with setting forth, since the ministers this day would, tediously enough, affright me with coming doom!"

In the narrow cell the last lines of several cut upon the thick quarrelled glass were legible in the light of the cresset which Major Weir, moved with a flaw of curiosity, brought near—

"Lord, since Thou knowest where all these atoms are,
I'm hopeful Thou'lt recover once my dust,
And confident Thou'lt raise me with the just"

The Marquess of Montrose motioned the master-jailor, stepping hastily back, to the one stool of the cell

"I am told that the wife with the shears is like to make no shill-shallying over snipping my thread of life in twain," he said, with a trace of deeper thoughtfulness than had hitherto showed in his voice. "Well, though 'twill not be one clockbeat sooner than God appoints, it behoves me to be putting order into my affairs, more especially when others, not myself, are concerned thereby."

He hesitated, scrutinising the dark face opposite.

"When I made petition for a razor or a barber, that I might not come hairy as a Highlandman's

shanks before the worshipful Parliament, it was refused," he went on at last "Your conscience will have no baiting of you, Major Weir, for any cockering of the prisoner committed to your ward, but you are a soldier like myself, and I would by many times rather entrust you with the matter I speak of than any of the godly ministers, who forget their own sins in their busyness of holding forth on the sins of others"

Since Major Weir had looked upon the words graven on the glass, he had seemed strangely tongue-tied. Though the Marquess paused now in his speech, he made no sign.

"It is but a trifle I am concerning you with," the other resumed, half-impatient of his silence. "Were it otherwise, or in any way injurious to you as Covenanter or soldier of the Parliament, I would not name it, but 'tis in sooth nothing more than the keeping of a key till the owner of the lock that fits it sends to ask it of you."

He had plunged his hand into the breast of his silver-laced scarlet coat, bringing out thence a brass key that from the intricacies of its wards fitted a strong lock somewhere. Major Weir rose up, receiving it from fingers that seemed minded to hold even while they gave.

"Who is he that will ask it, and what contents does it guard?" he demanded, breaking his silence.

"The rightful owner is over seas at the present," returned Montrose. "For which cause I, thinking 'twould be no long time till I had speech with him, undertook the conveyance to him of the key of the strong place where certain heirlooms of his house are laid up."

Silently his jailor put the key into his bosom. Already the tramp of the guard, quartered day and night in the Marquess' cell, was heard approaching, but their prisoner heeded nothing of them in the anxiety with which he watched Major Weir's receding figure.

"Trust begets trust!" he muttered. "It was

aye a word with my good old tutor of Napier, but I know not! I trusted Hamilton, and he failed me, and made the Trot of Tuirist of no avail! I trusted Assynt, and he betrayed me! I trusted my King, and I am lying here!"

He drew back against the window as his rough guard took up position, his shoulder in his attitude of depression hiding his gallant testimony of trust placed beyond possibility of betrayal. His perplexed thoughts seethed on.

"Yet I dared not risk a stripping of my possessions, which would have meant a losing of the key beyond trace! The fellow Weir is dour in speech and aspect beyond even the measure of a Covenanter, naetheless each and all of the Genevan black-cloaks to-day, with Johnstone of Warristoun at their head, spoke in praise of his integrity and uprightness. 'Tis the one chance, and I have taken it! So have I kept faith with my trust—and the rest to God!"

Thereafter he addressed himself to his prayers, and, later, slept the long dreamless sleep that bore witness, even to the unfriendliness about him in his prison, of a quiet mind.

CHAPTER II

WEBS ARE WEAVING

“TURN your hand !”

The inner turnkey cried it at the great window of the Tolbooth hall, and his brother of the keys unclosed the outer door. Already an agitation that for an instant might have tried conclusions with Major Weir's composure had vanished, on leaving Montrose's cell the dark man had quitted any disturbing reflections likewise.

Setting his face eastwards again, a few of his heavy strides brought him to a mansion which even the scanty light could not hinder from appearing imposing. Gabled and balconied, it stood among its smaller neighbours with the air of a great lady condescending even in attempts at sociability, the coronets and lozenge-shields of the housefront were not needed to proclaim superiority.

Major Weir passed between the pinnacles of the entrance to the court, which screened the gentility of the house from the humours of the Canongate, and proceeded to enter the lodging with the free step of an intimate. Avoiding the great hall with the ears and eyes of porters always at attention, he swerved to a postern commanding the terraces of a garden, and pushing it ajar, climbed the turret-stairs which it guarded. At the top he took breath. A gleam of light under a curtain beckoned like a finger to an apartment whence the murmur of voices sounded with considerable vivacity, but though the new-comer lingered with craned head, the speakers kept themselves at too cautious a pitch for eaves-droppers' profit. Ascertaining this fact, Major Weir

ended his pause, brusquely plucking back the curtain over the door of a chamber with walls and ceiling wrought into fantastic stucco-work of fruit and flowers, quaint ciphers and true-lovers' knots running here and there

The company who turned at his entrance were three in number, two men and a woman whose rigidly precise dress did not harmonise with her attitudes or the boldness of her eyes. As Major Weir approached she caught up a pomander of gold-work, smelling to it with an air of affected nausea.

"Faugh, ye bring the stink o' the Tolbooth in wi' ye, Major Weir!" she cried. "Does the traitor still stick it out among the prison-straw with his gallant bearing? for, by my nose, ye have been wi' him within the hour!"

"Is my niece's wit as sharp as her scent, good Master Weir?" added the elder of the two men. "'Tis an unusual hour to visit the prisoner, but doubtless you had your reason."

Major Weir seated himself deliberately.

"Lady Jean and you are in the right, my lord," he said. "I inspected my charge at this late hour, for, under the Commission's good leave, I am fain to ride for the Lammermuirs the morn's morn on a business that presses."

"Before the execution? The affair should be of importance if it warrants that, Major Weir!"

"Under your lordship's leave, I have said as much," returned the other staidly. "But if the Divine Providence shall not let me, I return in full time for the execution—the trial must first elapse."

The woman with the pomander clapped her hands together.

"Oh, rare!" she cried boisterously. "Doth the cat try the mice, Master Weir, or doth she hold, with our Commission of Estates, that the catching is trial enow for them, as it is trouble for her? My Lord Marquess had his trial at the Watergate yesterday forenoon, when the manner of his death was recited to him!"

The Marquess of Argyle shifted in his seat

"Enow is as good as a feast, Jean," he observed in an aside "Major Weir, in your comings and goings you have felt doubtless the pulse of the town anent this matter What think ye? I scruple not to tell you there are those in the Parliament who deem it somewhat of a risk of the heaviest to make so well-beseen a man as the Marquess die the death"

In the silence that fell, the woman's exclamation of disappointed spite seemed merely puerile The sands in the hour-glass trickled like earth on a coffin-lid before the man addressed spoke

"What do the Parliament fear, my lord?"

"The upgoing of the Blue Blanket of the mob, who saluted Montrose yesterday in his coming with groans and tears"

"Curs, my lord, seldom bite him who shows a bold front"

Argyle held his chin with the action of an indecisive nature

"We must bear in mind, Major Weir, that Scotland is not yet wholly purged and chosen," he began afresh "Truly, we whom the Lord has set apart as lapping as a dog lappeth, even our party of the League and Covenant, are strong and of good courage, but these sons of Zeruah, the Engagers, are ever fain to bow in the house of Rimmon, while the rank Malignants and Absolute Loyalists are like to outnumber us should they join forces under such provocation as the execution of so great a nobleman as Montrose"

Lady Jean sprang from her chair

"Woe worth the day, uncle, when a Campbell plays the woman over the foe of his house!" she cried "Where is your oath that the smouldering ashes of Castle Campbell should be quenched in the blood of the Grahame who set it alow?"

Her uncle turned on her with the sudden passion of a weak man

"You are overbold, wench, to hint that Argyle is moved in this matter by private grudges! Hold

your peace, as beseems the Lady Jean Gordon!" He spoke again to Major Weir, sitting with persistent down-dropped eyelids "We must lay our reckonings also with the powers over seas, who are like to turn protestants over this business 'Twould ill like me to see foreign battleships in the Firth"

"Will they do for the man what they did not for the master?" the gentleman who had not as yet spoken interpolated very scornfully

His father made a quick gesture for silence, and the three fell mute, glancing furtively at the man who sat so still When Major Weir began to speak at last, his whisper sounded through the silence like sea-surf hissing through black night—

"Montrose must die!"

In the face of the whispered words even the light woman sat without stirring muscle, staring at the man who had spoken with the passionless absolutism of an oracle Major Weir went on, without lifting gaze from his own hands—

"My Lord Argyle, you said but now that his death will cleave a gulf past all bridging between us of the Covenant and other parties in Scotland We want such a gulf!"

"To what purpose?"

The corners of Argyle's lips had grown white, sweat had burst out on his temples For the first time his counsellor looked up, fixing his eyes full on him

"That the King—when he comes—may be solely and wholly in the hands that have been set to the Solemn League and Covenant"

Under the dark look Argyle seemed strangely dominated, a half-smile changing the lines of regret and indecision about his mouth

"True!" he muttered "'Twill be the story of Strafford over again But"—an anxiety replaced the secret exultation in his face—"what if His Majesty draw back from the party who have done his General to death, and throw in his lot with the Prelatists and Malignants?"

"The King's business requires haste!" Major Weir returned with a significance

Argyle rose, beginning to pace about the room

"True!" he repeated "The deed once done, the Absolute Loyalists will draw back from a king who holds his friends so lightly Himself will in the act recognise the strength of the party that offers him the crown of Scotland, ay, and that holds such proofs of his secret negotiations with us in these last months, that unsupported he will scantily dare to quarrel with us" He wheeled, with a return of his former passion, on the man still seated by the table "Yet I take you for witness, Major Weir, that I did mine endeavour to save mine ancient enemy—there was a moment when his fate lay in your hands!"

"His blood be on my head!" Major Weir answered sedately

A thoughtfulness had fallen on the group, the woman's riotous exultation fused in some deeper reflections, the tenor of which might be gathered from the gestures and languishing looks which she had risen to practise before the mirror, framed in carved oak, hanging at the chamber's farther end Lord Lorn had shot a single glance at her, and now leant back on his chair biting his finger and eyeing his father, who maintained stand at Major Weir's side

"There is yet another matter scarce like to be brought into the Parliament's considers," he said in a lower tone "According to advices from overseas the King Charles has been bred up to the corruptions of the French Court, and will be ill to hold and bind in a town where his riotous living will be withheld from him, his inner man pining for the swine's husks ere it is attempered to the strong meat which natheless our worthy ministers will feed out to him That such godliness may grow to be second nature to him, good Master Weir, will of a surety be granted to our strivings before the mercy-seat, but yet it has once or twice been shown to me that a lad of the fallen nature, which by all tales the royal Stewart seemeth to possess, may in the meantime

sicken and start aside from a life of such sanctified discipline as he must lead in Embro' "

Major Weir heard him through, with something in his listening as though the speaker were coming to a point anticipated by him already

"Your meaning, my lord, I take to be that all clatters and scandal must be avoided in our godly town," he returned then "Yet as it was permitted of Heaven that Samson should take to wife a Philistine woman, so I, for the sake of gaining time for the good seed to spring up, will take the responsibility on myself of putting your hand upon a means of creeshing the King's paws, as housewives rub butter upon a cat's forefeet that he may be content to bide in a new dwelling-place "

From the darklings of the mirror a pale gleam was darted at him out of the eyes of the woman whose shoulders were instinct with listening

"And that without giving rise to evil-speaking ? " hesitated Argyle

"Tongues are wagged by the eye-strings, my lord, and my poor household is in repute enow to afford small occasion for idle clashes The *butter* I speak of has never been laid eyes on by mother's child in Edinburgh town I ride to-night to fetch it "

As Weir spoke he rose, sliding the shutter from a shot window looking from the east Through the opening the flying night showed her heel, the cocks from the Seyton Yards were crowing up the day

Wrapt in his great cloak, Major Weir left the Moray House unseen by any but the group of Campbells who had, for apparently no other purpose but pleasure and convenience, pitched tent in the hospitable mansion that was so soon to give a bride to Lorn With the downbent look that was habit of the man, he made way through the town where housewives were already buckling to at the bidding of the light Once, as at the accustomed signal *Gardylloo* ' he glanced quickly up to avoid the descent of a bucket of refuse flung streetwards from an eight-storey

window, the crone who had sped it on its road pointed him out to a neighbour

"Ech, sirs," said she, "yonner gaes Angelical Thomas on some errand o' godliness' I wouldna wonner gin he hasna stayed oot o's bed this nicht for his warstlings i' prayer for the saul o' him i' the Tolbooth' Yonner gaes he east, hauden doon 's heid sae meek as gin he hadna the most muckle propine o' prayeyr in a' braid Scotland' Fowk 'at hear him say 'at they canna keep frae greetin', sae bonny an' lang are his supplications, ne'er stopping nor sticklin' for ae word, and abune a', fleechin' 'at his grace o' supplication mayna be made a snare to himself, but that he an' a' men may i' the sma'est maitter be keepit i' their honesty Fegs' we in Embro' may lie doon an' tak' oor rest, syne the angel o' the Lord is compassin' oor city like yon' "

The subject of her eulogy had meanwhile reached the inn nearest the Bristo Port, and was bargaining with the landlord of the *Hole i' the Wa'* for a stout roadster The business left the seller looking after the purchaser somewhat ruefully

"Troth, gin the saints are such rare hands at a bargain, sma' need is there for the promise that they sall inherit the yerth, syne they are like enow to win it by their wits' " he muttered, watching the horseman receding at a smart staying trot along the southward road

The roadster held out well, and Major Weir rode him hard that day He had pushed in the direction of the Lammermuirs, and was still riding it, though the sun that had travelled with him had long wheeled behind him, and the air drawing in the faces of horse and man was caller with coming night as well as with the breath of the mountain Ground was rough under the striving hoofs, and the whistlings of the curlews were loud and shrill over the patches of lilac ling to either hand, earth and sky stretched wide and fair and barren, save where southwards a debatable line of blue peaks faintly troubled the peaceful flowing together of earth and sky Major

Wen's black cloak was grey with the dust of the miles, and he sat the horse like a man saddle-sore, but till a certain anxiety crept into the look which he suddenly lifted to the evening light his set face had through the day played sentinel to his thoughts.

"The night cometh!" he muttered "Dark, night! Black night!"

Under the elixir of the spurs his nag broke into the morning's pace, but after a while flagged again. The rider more than once shifted in the saddle, looking left and right as though in search of some lifting of the solitude, but it remained unbroken. From the valley up the steepening sheep-tracks brown night was stealing on him, and for every stride of the weary horse night made two.

It was a very small sound that suddenly gave the horse a breathing-space. A grating, scarcely louder than the scunching of a trove of bleached bone by a weasel's teeth, but the soldier's ear knew the thrill of iron on stone. He checked, raising his hand with the pistol in it at cock.

"Show yourself, or I fire!" he commanded in his imperious voice.

As though the words had been a spell to reveal the invisible, the solitude about him grew at once living. Men, to the number of fifty or more, rose with trained swiftness from strewn grey rock or brake of broom, each with eyes and weapon levelled on the man who sat his horse in the midst of them as if he had been the leader of them all.

Major Wen sat his horse and looked at the ambush which had trapped him, unwary, but he left it for them to speak. In the darkening light eyes were strained at the inscrutable face, then, with a laugh, a man stepped forward, waving his party a pace or so back.

"Your name and errand, sir?" he demanded.

"I am not wont to give up the one or the other at the bidding of every run-the-causey whose whimsey it may be to play highwayman!" replied Major Weir coldly. "If you take it upon yourself to put

travellers through their carritch, sir, I would be fain for a sight of your commission ! ”

“ The light fails, but meseems it stands writ in legible characters enow,” responded the other, pointing to the band behind him with a significant gesture “ ’Tis the one sort of commission in fashion on the Border, where Right is apt to spell itself with an M in place of the R ! ”

An older man stepped forward to the speaker’s side

“ Mayhap there is no need to trouble the gentleman,” he suggested, in a voice that held something fawning in it “ If we have the honour to speak with Major Weir of the worshipful samthood of the West Bow, there is but one errand that could have caused him to orphan Auld Reekie’s conventicles of his presence while he rides forth into our wild Borderside To be a father of the fatherless and the keeper of her fat inheritance is a right task to a Covenanter’s mind ”

“ So turn your horse’s head to the stables whence you’ve lifted him, Master Psalmsinger ! ” put in the first speaker “ Each man to the task he’s best at, and by my years in France I shall cut as good a figure at taking care of the fatherless, especially when she’s the bonniest lass on both sides the Border, as you doubtless do at the reverend conventicles I make no question that the money-bags would have a brave keeper in you, but so they would in honest Sandy here, and I fear the assembly of the godly would find him a poor exchange for you ! ”

“ Esmé, you need to learn that there are better ways of coming at the honey than by upsetting the bee-skep,” muttered the other at his ear “ Sir,” he went on to the horseman sitting immovable in the ring of dimly outlined figures, “ if, as your coming hints, your purpose is to come between the clan and the daughter of their dead chief, it is my duty to warn you that I would not stake a boddle on your life ! ”

“ Sir, to threaten one of Lesley’s soldiers is wasted time ! ” responded Major Weir

The young fellow called Esmé laughed shortly

"To cross the will o' the Hopes is wasted time, old Sixth-Head-and-Lastly," he exclaimed "Come, you shall taste our hospitality and be my groomsman before Embro' sees your sweet sanctimonious face again—foul fall me if you shall not! When little Chrystal sees that her besiegers have cut off the aid she reckoned on, the maiden citadel will surrender at discretion!"

"I protest, cousin!" a falsetto voice made itself heard behind him "As the sworn knight and paladin of the most rare and delightful lady Chrystal, I may not brook to hear one speak of her in my presence with aught smacking of familiarity!"

Major Weir's eye went to the speaker, of whom he could discern nothing but a slight boyish outline, but his bridle at the moment being seized on by Esmé, the company set themselves to the hill. It had grown dark about them, as the party rounded an elbow of the rocky track the burning of a camp-fire announced in smoky rubric that the Hopes had taken to the open.

The prisoner so unexpectedly captured did not waste words on the situation. The gaiety with which the clan had received him waned before the containedness of the secret man, Esme's proposal that they should teach Master Lead-in-Prayer the trick of placing himself outside a "*greybeard*" being speedily exchanged for the stretching of a sacking over and behind two convenient boulders, the shelter thus formed being allotted to the sole occupation of the guest. The little space was not set so far from the camp-fire as to miss its friendly warmth, and the flickering light did battle with the shadows that writhed and leapt about the still figure, as though the thoughts that held him waking had taken actual shape.

Master Weir, sitting with his hand over his mouth, watched with sombre eyes the scene before him. The drinking and the dicing and the swearing that went on about the fireglow might reasonably have

turned any godly "plant" from the Bowhead into a prophet of denunciation, but the prisoner's spirit of tolerance seemed ample for it all. As the night gradually claimed her heriot of sleep from ardent striving humanity, he still sat gazing at the embers winking like fiery eyes through the darkness, a figure wakeful, watching for something that was bound to come.

And it came. Cautiously a shadow grew detached from the shadows about the red coals, trailing itself inch by inch towards the man watching it from the first. A plaid about the face hindered scrutiny, but when the visitor had wormed way between the overhanging boulders, and gathered himself to his haunches, Major Weir showed no surprise at seeing the narrow crafty face of the man whom he had heard named Sandy.

"I have waited on this hour, Major Weir, that you and I might confabulate in peace and quiet," quoth that gentleman. "Youth is aye like to upset the pot with over-eagerness, and that hothead, my Cousin Esmé, thinks in laying hold of you that we have hold of the matter in a nutshell. But a nutshell makes a small handful for many hands, the while consideration moved me to come to you."

He paused, looking cunningly at his hearer.

"Esmé conceits that, as chief of the clan, the lassock Chrystal by rights falls to him," he went on. "'Twould be a sair pity that so much good spending-money as is tacked to that lass' tails should come into the young lightly-come-lightly-go's fingers, and a' for want o' two-three words from a girl's lips." He took breath, as though bracing himself by the other's attitude of attention. "Major Weir, that word will never be said while Chrystal Hope remains backed up in her stubbornness by those in the clan who have made up their mouths for her themselves, but away from them, and wi' a friend to me beside her, the speaking o' the word would be a short matter."

In the tent the gloom was sapping the gleam

Major Weir could but dimly see the foxy face craned forward

"So if by chance betwixt the daik and the dawn ye should make your endeavours to escape, you could be at Clear Havens before any of us could miss ye. The lass is thiang to be in Embio' town; and once there, if a household o' the repute of yours should attest that she made no bones at my once calling her *my wife*, the deed's done!"

A rally of the dying fire filled the tent with light. It showed Major Weir's hand dropped from his mouth, lying, palm outwards, on his knee.

Into the receptive palm the Hope laid something taken from his girdle. The chink of gold made itself heard as the two hands moved apart.

"There's man in the kitchen!" quoted Sandy significantly, as he pulled his plaid about him. "As much more, and double it, when the word's sworn to, Major Weir."

Major Weir did not change his attitude when his visitor was gone. He sat thoughtful, darting glances into the gloaming of the northern night, by times weighing the pulse that had been brought into his hand.

As much as an hour had gone by before he turned his head at a whisper of his name. Another muffled figure was standing in the opening of his rocks, his good ears recognised the falsetto of the lad who had entered protest against Esme's cavalier mention of his kinswoman.

"I vow I have lost my beauty-sleep in gaining this word with you, sir," he said, coming forward mincingly. "If my mistress Chrystal were not moon to my nights, as she is sun to my days and lodestar to my life, I could not have endured the vigil!"

He wavered a little in his careful affectations, as he saw through the dusk the waiting eyes fixed on him.

"Did I think that you would verily and in sooth widow the Border of its fairest flower, I would slay you with these hands!" he cried magnificently.

"I would not fley you, sir, seeing that you are a guest on Hope ground, but you must learn that I am sworn to do so much for him who robs me of the lady whose token I wear!"

He took off his cap with a proud gesture, displaying a lady's red-heeled slipper fastened upon it

"She cast it after me one day when I left her presence, with so true an aim that mine head sang for an hour thereafter," he remarked "I set great store thereby, reading in the romances that fair ladies do always bear themselves untoward to the knight whom they most affect, and sooth, there is not one in the clan who has had Mistress Chrystal's white hand about his ears as I have, or who she rates as she rates me for a born-and-bred fool"

He paused for a simper, replacing the cap on the dandy curls of his head

"So, sir, the lady loving and the bridegroom longing, makes a short wooing," he pursued "But when all's said and done, I am a Hope, and may I never wear lace more—I know not if you have remarked these ruffles of mine, they have been luckier than their wearer, and at court!—if I stomach the thought of spilling Hope blood, as 'tis bound to be spilt if Esme sees that sweet Mistress Chrystal prefers another A runaway! that's the road out o' the moss, and 'tis to win your help in the matter, sir, that I've cheated sleep's kind lap to-night"

The turning of the dark face towards him took the place of audible encouragement

"If I, whose watch it is, connive at your evasion, you can reach Clear Havens with the sun My cruel mistress is in haste for the humours of the town, she will rather spur than stay you in returning thither I propose, with your good leave, to fall upon you in your passage, and, without scath done on purse or person, to relieve you of your fair ward Natheless, there had best be some appearance of violence, that my lovely may see the undaunted temper I am of, but I will strike gently, sir, your grey hairs shall be your safeguard!"

The man sitting before him moved as though impatient of the delicately-mouthed sentences. Young Hope went on hastily, handling his cap again—

“For a pledge of my good faith in this matter, I have nought but these diamonds to offer you. They are of the finest water, if you are knowledgeable in stones, and tolerably cut. Truly their absence will make my baret somewhat poverty-stricken in aspect, but if, as Scripture saith, the price of a good woman is above rubies, that of sweet Chrystal must be far and away beyond all the diamonds of Amsterdam.”

He had loosed the aigrette holding the jay's feather in his cap, and now slid it into the hand lying receptive on his neighbour's knee. One of the square-tipped fingers moved twice or thrice, approving the cutting of the jewels, then the aigrette vanished where the purse had done.

“The night wanes,” quoth the lad, stumbling to his feet. “Now is the time to evade, sir, and I am at your service down these sheepwalks, should you need a guide in your goings.”

“None but my staff!”

The words, in their harsh sudden tones, startled the boy oddly. With a haste that he could not account for, he darted from the tent, edging himself where swathes of sleeping comrades lay thickest before he took breath or thought.

Weir seemed in no haste to be gone from his captors. He sat as he had sat the night through, pulling his cloak about him as the earth grew wan in its throes with the young day,—a stern attentive outline with a certain prescience in its watching calm.

A pale day, like a premature birth, had escaped into the world before he rose to his feet. A gay voice whistling a stave sounded behind his rocks, heralding the handsome careless face of the young chief Esmé.

“So, Dominie Wake-in-Prayer, you and I are the two astir in this coop of lie-a-beds!” was his salutation. “Full time 'tis for you to be stirring your reverent bones, if you are to be at Clear Havens before the breakfast bannocks are cold!”

He laughed, clapping the other on the shoulder

"The starch they starched you with was of a right stiffness, brother!" he said "Not a muscle twitches to show your surprise that we should be so ready to let fly the bird we caged last night! Come, let's talk as we go, I cannot take it upon myself to keep you longer in the tents of the ungodly!"

He slipped an arm through his prisoner's, drawing him with a hold that, light as it was, held like steel, from his prison of the night. Once out, he wheeled smartly round the boulders, his free step disconcerting his companion's staid stride

CHAPTER III

CRYSTAL OF CLEAR HAVENS

LINKED to each other by a lithe right aim, the two men went silently forward. Moaning was faintly on them before Esme stopped or stayed in the headlong progress which, in a freakish humour, he had rendered of the roughest, scrambling and leaping with apparent unconsciousness that soberer bones than his own were leashed to his. Major Wen's breathing was somewhat broken, and his high colour flushed to purple, when at last his guide slackened pace, turning a mischievous smile on the unsmiling face beside him.

"A canter like that will supply your marrow-bones for the next exercise," he remarked. "See, there sits Clear Havens, cosy as a cloven hen on her nest."

They had reached a shoulder of the mountain, the ground at their feet falling away sharply in its trend. A curious colourlessness, as of landscape seen by moonlight or in dreams, lay on the tableland of rolling, bushless moor, above which the rampart of hilltops threw curtain after curtain of thinly-grassed rock into the pasture below. Like the superb nakedness of some resting gladiator, the bleak sweep of the uplands was exultant in the strength of the rock-framework underlying its simple grandeur of line and curve, the perfection of the modelling needing no frippery of ornament to distract the eye. Bare ridges of rock scalped with peat, black and broken at edge, lifted themselves to the blue, milky-blue as the crescent sea-line dim towards north and west. Seawards, indeed, grass showed green and growing, the trees banned from the steep places

there obeying the voice of spring, each after its kind, hawthorn setting bunches of young green on angular twigs, larches unfolding rosy tassels among last year's cones, the "pussy-paws" on yellow-ochred withys thrusting back brown huskings before pink youth should merge into sheeny grey. But from Lammer Law no hint of life or colour trifled with the sullenness of moor and mountain stretching southwards, furrowed with glens and gullies, till the glamour of distance came to soften the harshness of detail. At the edge of the world, tremulous, lilac, farther hilltops rose up in serried plumps. Rubers Law, the Eildons, farthest of all the Cheviots, with their vaunt of peace to Scotland, defiance to England. Through the stillness the voice of streams in spring-spate, hurrying from the winterlong ice-prison, noisily brawling like men-at-arms insufficiently chastened by a sojourn in the Guardhouse.

But what fixed Major Weir's eyes was no feature of the wide, windy country. To his right, some hundreds of feet below, a green *haugh* lay extended, a setting, as it were, to the grey mass of building that, in Esme's word, brooded over its meadow. The square bastel-house of the Border had evidently been the parent of the dwelling clustered round its solid sturdiness, but the days when the peel-tower could have held its own were long over. Peace and plenty seemed the attributes of the straggling mansion nestled in its island of *haugh* under the lee of the moors, the man eyeing it wondered within himself why the reckless band a mile or so behind him had not made their own of it and its mistress with no time-wasting shilly-shallyings.

"Because, old Share-with-the-Brethren, pity to split the child when it might be kept whole for one lucky fellow!" the young chief at his side remarked suddenly, as though answering his thought. "And that's rhyme and reason for our standing here."

"Speak more clearly if you would be understood."

"My speech should be clear, for its burden is Chrystal, Chrystal, and again Chrystal," responded

the young fellow with a light laugh "Look you, I love Chrystal Hope, and Chrystal Hope flouts me To spite me she is fit to wed Jock the Dandy, or Sandy—no, burst me' I think she wou'd sooner have me than Tod Sandy at a pinch' But with everything that wears breeks in the clan for her to twist round her pretty finger, you can swear by your psalter that the pinch is not yet' She and the clan must be divorced, and your sweet self must be King's Advocate to effect the separation "

"And if I do not ? "

"Then, Master Turn-the-sermon-glass-and-we'll-have-another-round, you will lay the guilt of murder on my soul and your own' Tuts' 'tis pleasanter to have gold in your pouch than steel in your ribs, and the one can be come by as lightly as the other "

His fingers fiddled with the hilt of a sword which he wore, and the glint of its cairngorms may have dazzled Major Weir's eyes to the lowering of them In the stillness the notes of a lark dropped through the spirals of its flight like April rain

The elder man was the first to speak

"I purpose to receive the maid Chrystal into my godly household Should you carry her off from thence, the upshot of the matter must lie with Heaven, as I, with no servants in my dwelling, can make little head against you "

Esmé nodded gaily

"I warrant if Heaven knows its business it will think the sooner out of your hands into mine the better for the *maid* Chrystal' " he retorted "Well, valiant Sir Sin-on-the-Sly, and what do you expect to make of our bargain ? "

"Young man," returned Major Weir severely, "my patience wears thin against your japes Have a care lest, railing thus against the saints, you may be cast quick into Tophet' "

"All the better for me to have a friend there already," responded his hearer unabashed "For the sake of the good word you'll speak for me in those quarters I'll not beat you down more than will be

for your soul's good from the sum you've fixed on already in that long head of yours"

"Sir, it would be well if you strove for charity!" The answer came slowly, the speaker, it might be, adjusting two trains of thought

"Ay, we find charity a useful cloak!" Esmé cried significantly "But 'tis no part of my business to cover up your sins, Mr Two-faces, but rather to nose 'em out, as a dog doth a bone that smelleth somewhat rank The covering will, I dare swear, be looked to by you indifferent well Now, for the thrd and last time, *your price*, sir!"

"Twelve thousand pounds Scots!"

The words showed the sudden ferocity of a bull baited to the charge A certain aversion—the nearest to what the dark nature could know of fear—to one who, by an instinct strange as the hazel's divination of springs unguessed at, had read so truly what other men went blind to, prompted Major Weir to the sudden coming to terms, short-cut out of unwelcome companionship That the insolence of this young roisterer should not miss chastisement, was another of the good reasons that made it needful, and Major Weir pledged faith with himself that if Providence held misfortune in store for this godless scoffer, he would see to it that Providence should not lack an instrument

Esmé whistled, clearly as the merles in the spice-scented hawthorns below

"Did the deil, when you sold your soul to him, teach you his own trick of bargaining? If I were roused at auction I should not fetch the half!"

The other's eyes were lifted in the long penetrating stare that was theirs

"Your bond for the amount on the fortune that comes to you with the wife!"

"I vow your minnie must have tint her wits in the straw, for you brought a double share into the world with you! Well, my bond be it then, sir, it needs not to stand in Solomon his proverbs that 'tis wisdom to make it better worth while to serve

me than to sell me ! The morrow of the night that one bed holds Chrystal and me, sees the money paid into your paw ! ”

Esmé paused, picking up a flat slate fragment at his feet

“ Writing gear’s scarce with us of the Borderside, where there is small occasion of noting down the heads of such godly discourse as yours,” he remarked, drawing the rapier with which his fingers had toyed “ This slate must play parchment, and for ink, bright and red, this ! ”

He picked the arm from which he had rolled back the sleeve, letting the blood trickle with entire indifference, while he traced upon the slate with the swordpoint The rough siver was covered with steep lines of red writing when at last he handed it with a laugh to Major Weir

“ Take it with my benison ! It damns you by the having as much as me by the giving, that’s one comfort ! ”

Holding the morsel to dry in the wind about the hill, Major Weir spoke—

“ The reason, young man, that I take it, is that the wife coveted by your kind would be apt to hinder me and mine in our walk Zionwards ‘ Be ye separate, my people ! ’ is our watchword ! ”

Esmé’s reply was not in words Winking in the dark set face, he turned on his heel, dashing like a deer in the direction of the camp

The witness of the unlooked-for retreat stood motionless during an assault and repulse in the fluted courtship of the brace of blackbuds on opposite rowan bushes, his face turned to the aunt where the girl who had cost three men their gold, their diamonds, and their blood, wardening jealously her virginal freedom, waited and watched for her dead father’s friend Thomas Weir weighed many things in the scale of his thought before he at last took up his feet to descend the hill

The shale, which lay thick as autumn leaves underfoot, made it gliddery going for the heavy-limbed,

unadroit figure More than once the unpractised feet slipped, Major Weir rolling his length before, catching at the low-growing clumps of bilberry bushes beaded with crude green fruit, he could arrest his downfall Stiff briar-trails gripped detainingly after him, corded roots of hawthorn tripped him, all the hill seemed at war with the stranger whose foot trampled its greys and greens in a dogged progress

It was day, broad and full, when the kinder pasture-land received the traveller, who stepped out among the tough stems of the ragwort at a mended pace Smoke, streaming pennon-wise against the insipid blue of a spring sky, spoke of fires and food within the grey walls now at no great distance, the noises of the farmyard gave homely greeting after their own fashion

A small figure, straying in fitful tangents over the daisy-starred lea in front of the stone-ball topped gateposts, was the first to wind the stranger's approach Major Weir, leaving a grey-green trail in his passage over the dew-roughened grass, saw his coming change the loiterer to listener, before he was near enough to see that the little lad looking so intently in his direction looked with sightless eyes Of the pale blue of the euphrasia flowers, the eyes set in the child-face were stretched wide, they rested on the oncoming man with a singular directness, never flinching for the level sunbeams that would have dazzled sight

The tall man had come close upon him before the child broke ground With the wheel of a frightened rabbit he turned to run, but Major Weir baulked him, catching him by the shoulder

"Urchin, can you bring me to speech with Mistress Chrystal Hope?"

A cry, shrill as that of the woodland thing menaced by a danger, answered the bland voice, the blind child trembling to convulsion at the touch of the hand reaching through his dark

"The burning hand! The burning hand!" The

trible tones of his shriek rang up through the daisied meadow "Eh, the tall black man wi' the tall black staff flittin' on afore!"

Major Weir half-raised the staff in his hand, as though to menace the child to silence, but the outcry had been an alarm. Figures were flitting swiftly over the farmyard

"Whisht, fool! Peace thee!"

The boy had flung himself face downwards, twisting and writhing as if in bodily pain

"The burning hand! the burning hand!" he shrieked again "Eh, Mistress Chrystal, gangna wi' the lang black man, wha does the biddin' o' the lang black staff!"

With an imprecation muttered behind locked teeth, Major Weir stooped over him, pressing his hand on the screaming mouth. The relentless, unseen grip won silence, the child, with a sob of terror, sinking into a swoon

The man, raising him in his arms, glanced furtively around. Running figures were close at hand, the foremost, a little old lady in a dress of fashion some fifty years back, reached him as he looked

"Blind Hughie!" she cried "Man, luck doesna enter Clear Havens wi' ye, 'at you first act suld have been to fright Blind Hughie! Eh, the wean's in a dwawm! reach him to me, I say"

She took the child from his arms in an imperious haste, not sparing a glance for the dark face so high above her own. In spite of tall red heels, the tiny creature's head scarcely reached to the breast of the man glooming upon her with the same dark look which Esmé's cavalier carriage had called forth

"The bairn is ill-guidit, and will make those in charge of him sup sorrow before his finishing," he said "It may be that my coming frightened him from some boldness that he had in hand, for he fell a screaming thus lustily when I came upon him something suddenly"

"It speaks waur for you nor for him," the little dame insisted "Faith, sir, if Blind Hughie skreighed

out at sight o' ye, 'tis a poor commend to bring in your pocket to Clear Havens Blind Hughie the See-er is one of those who can look within the crystal and see things hidden from mortal eyes"—

"Peace!" interrupted Major Weir with sudden violence "What manner of idolatrous superstition is this in mine ears? Are not ye in the Lowlands sworn your four times yeaily to avoid ought savouing of witchcraft, charms, or spells, vain rites as crystal-gazing"—

"Clashes!" panted his heaier ureveriently The slight figure, borne awry by the weight of the unconscious child, directed itself on the outside stone stair of the dwelling-house fronted by the farmyard through which they were picking way "Folks that flout the crystal fear the crystal, and that's as true as if it stood writ in Davie Lindsay!"

A clamour in the rear spared her companion's reply A farm-lass, broad-faced and stupid-eyed as one of her own cows, was running towards them, holding something that glistened in her outstretched palm

"Belike the stranger gentlebody 'ill hae drappit it!" she gasped "'Twas juist lym' cannily on the gowans whan I spied it!"

Major Weir held out his hand At first glance he had recognised the brass key with the curiously twisted handle which Montrose had committed to his charge in the cell of the Tolbooth As he restored it to the pouch whence presumably the blind boy's struggles had dislodged it, it vexed his instinctive secretiveness to find the old lady's eyes upon him

A moaning of the child in her arms brought her look quickly back Leading way through the stone-flagged hall of the building, she turned into a small parlour beyond, to lay her burden upon a settle, the gay parrots and rosettes of flower-faces in its cross-stitch showing oddly against the wan little sealed visage The scent of essences came sharply to the nose of the fasting man within the doorway,

as she reached one thing and another from an awmry, rubbing the blue-veined temples and little limp hands

"For a dwawm, Hungary water is soveiegn," she remarked in a thin cracked voice "The ledly o' Bothwell was for clapper-clawin' me the day because o' my putting in the blossoms o' the rosemary to the spuit to distil, but I made bold to tell hei that all her sage and ginger would never call kin wi' mine,—made *wi' brans*! Fie! the auld Covenanter is yoked there to the auld Adam, and the last was the one to run awa' wi' the cart when she heard yon!"

"Evil! the evil in Clear Havens this day!"

The cry, sharp and shrill, cut through hei talkativeness. For a moment the red danger-light, the glimmer in the eyes of an old brock couching with bristling neckridge within his barrel, showed in the eyes of Major Weir, but the old lady avoided further outcry by catching the reviving child to hei, giving him in charge to a servant somewhere without. Freed of him, she returned, adjusting the old-fashioned French hood about her face

"Our room better than our company will sort him," she said, taking seat in the window that looked off to the hills "He will get over his fright in a while, playing himself by the burn— Lord sain us! what has ta'en the man?"

The tall figure had reeled back against the wall, clutching at his heart-place. The dark face would not show whiter in the death-hour

"The burn! What burn?" he muttered, as his hostess ran towards him, but before she could snatch up the phial of Hungary water the seizure was passing off. A will of iron controlled the tremor that had seemed of blank fear, with an entirely steady hand Major Weir put the cordial to his lips, drinking it in quick gulps

"A dizziness bred of long riding and fasting laid hold of me!" he remarked, with his ordinary composure

"Riding! Where tint ye the naggie?"

"In the hands of the ungodly" A pale anger kindled in the man's face "Those calling themselves Hope made prisoner of me and of my beast in my journey, lawlessly detaining me the night through in their camp"

"But here ye are, man, snug in your two shoes!" cried the little lady

"I escaped, under Providence, at the cock-crowing"

"Ye escaped! Then Esme Hope wasna wi' them?"

Major Weir fancied a relief in the tones

"One I heard named Esmé Hope was the most graceless there," he returned dourly "He it was who tailed in blasphemous fashion against the called and chosen"—

A tiny hand, tapering from the spreading of the whalebone stiffened sleeve, was raised imperiously

"I am not a congregation, sir, do not preach at me!" commanded the little dame "What I would come at is, if Esmé was there, how contrived you your escape? Tod! it would no' be possible an he was to the fore!"

She rose from the window, stepping to and fro in sudden excitement

"The thing's no' possible!" she repeated "And since only Sandy knew of the letter which summoned you from Edinburgh, and Esme in his lealong days would never put finger to any web of Sandy's weaving, a blind man could see that if Esmé suffered your escape, 'twas because he thinks to find in you help to play his own game"

Major Weir did not answer the flurried murmur. He was watching the little feet which paced the boards so hastily, as she wheeled again to face him he took a forward step

"Chrystal Hope!" said he

A girl's laugh, merry-careless as the tuit of the blackbird on the hawthorn without, answered him after the brief, astonished pause The little lady put up both hands to the French hood with its friendly disguising shadow

"Chrystal Hope!" she repeated, thrusting it back unceremoniously. The thin tones that Major Weir had heard previously had fallen into voice that matched the laugh. "Chrystal Hope, who has but now found out that the two strongest men in the clan have set out to hunt her down to the lair she thought to lie snug in, yet who does not care a brass boddle for them, since Major Weir has shown this day he has a head long enough to outwit the two of them." She bent back to survey the impressive figure with amused curiosity. "Eh, man, tell me how ye guessed me?" she cried, and hung on his arm.

He freed himself from the confiding contact.

"An eldern person treads on his heels," he said shortly, pointing to the little feet a-tiptoe to reach his arm. "And wherefore this play-acting?"

Her eyes, grey without a tinge of blueness, searched his.

"A play-acting which, since Duk o' the Haugh let out that my kinsman Sandy had wheedled him into sight of the letter that he carried to Embro' town, I have practised night and day to perfect," she returned. "If, as I feared was like, the Hopes had broken into Clear Havens after me, an old woman might have made a fitting of it where a young one could not."

She laughed again, the glee of a child released from task rippling in her voice.

"Eh, I am weary of playing mouse to their pussies," she cried. "Sir, Major Weir, sure my father knows this day that ye've ta'en the care o' his pet bairn on yourself, and oh, man, God knows too!"

"Go wash the paint-smearings from your face!" Major Weir interrupted her eager speech. "I would rest awhile, and we must set face for Edinburgh in no long space."

Chrystal started with a pretty gesture of recollection.

"Malice light on me if I have not forgot my manners!" cried she. "Welcome to Clear Havens,

my father's friend, as Chrystal Hope welcomes you to her heart, for indeed and sooth it will be no fault of hers if ye do not find a daughter in her ! ”

She had pressed upon him again in her eagerness, laying her pretty hands on his, slack-folded. For a pulse-beat something like a softening shadow flitted over the man's face, then he pushed the soft hands down.

“Go, child ! ” he commanded.

A housewifely clatter rose on the heels of Mistress Chrystal's somewhat disconcerted retreat kitchenwards, but the man, sharpset and weary as the journey topped by a night in the open had left him, did not abandon himself to anticipatory savourings. He stood upright, head depressed, the stealthy eye-play of the beast, stiffening sinew for spring, searching the green broken country through the window-panes.

He muttered inly twice or thrice—

“Folk that flout the crystal fear the crystal ! The jade was right. The crystal in which a man's secret life might be shown ! ”

Again—

“Aha ! a goodly showing ! Would not the crystal be blasted into shards ? ”

And once again—

“The terrible crystal ! I mind master James Durham holding forth on yon text in the Tron Kirk ! ”

Where the ground dimpled in a green depression, a cradle, it might be, for some stream laughing and lurking under its sheltering bank, Major Weir looked longest. As if his eyes drew his feet, he moved presently, quitting the parlour by a door in the wall set towards the hills and the daisied meadowland.

The sun had licked the dew up, and the meadow was dry walking. Yet when, some quarter-hour later, the dark man stood again within the parlour, mud on his riding-boots gleamed wet as though he had trodden in a marshy place. He breathed heavily, as a hound who has run down his prey.

He had scarcely entered by the one door before the other creaked upon its hinges. Framed in the

lintels a girl's figure appeared, the colours of her homespun kirtle and folded kerchief giving her something of the air of the spring-gladness without, where the white of the butterflies showed in flashes against the blue of the harebells

Chrystal Hope at seventeen had the purity of the spring-blossoms in her face. Slight and light as a wild-bird the tiny figure stood, the oval of the sweet cheek-line contradicted in its touch of melancholy by the laughter at play in the black-lashed grey eyes, —a laughter that masked their quick glances and far sight, as the smile of the red lips masked the resolve in their curve. The head, with its clear-gold hair curling at pleasure under its snood of black, was set on the neck with the airy defiance of a harebell on its stem. The whole dainty creature stood in the narrow parlour as a princess might stand in garret or king's palace, and owe nothing of dignity to surroundings.

Major Weir looked long upon her, as a dealer catering for the jaded taste of a patron might scan the hip-line, the gloss on skin, each point of a slave-girl stripped for market in old Rome or Carthage. His look assured him that his pledge to Aigyle had been no vain boast.

The girl came forward, laying the heaped tray which she carried before him.

"Now, feed you, and thereafter rest you a wee," she said, "for ye may well be forfaughten. I'll wager a tappit hen the risk-craigs, my cousins, were not overly abundant in their housekeeping."

She knelt at his feet, preparing to draw off his riding-boots, with the readiness of service of a daughter to a father. At the unexpected touch of wet mud she exclaimed gaily

"Wow, man!" she cried, "the ill callants must have bedded ye in the moss! The leather maun be fairly soaked not to have dried by this time of day."

"Nay, 'twas this mornin'," returned Weir, somewhat more quickly than his wont. "As you divined

a while back, the young man Esmé led me forth, truly through the worst places ”

“I’ll warrant Esmé would have scant mercy on a townsman,” Chrystal laughed, but with a catch in her breath “Did he exact no price for releasing the clan’s prisoner ? ” she asked hurriedly

“He professed he would do ten times more to thwart the man Sandy,” responded Weir glibly

“Ay, that’s Esme ! Whereabouts did he leave you, sir ? ”

Major Weir looked steadily from the window

“He parted from me on the hill, crying that he would lift one of pretty Chrystal’s pet lambs to requite her for flouting him when last they came together,” he avowed “To my seeming, he steered on a point beyond the nut coppice yonder ”

“He would come out by the burn,” murmured Chrystal, too absorbed to notice her companion’s gesture, that of one shuddering from an omen She laughed, seeming to throw off a fear “Well, a lamb, or even its dad the bell-wether, is a cheap price to pay for flouting Esme, if any flout would teach him that *No*, said even in his handsome face, means *No* ! ”

Her guest had seated himself, falling-to on his meat in his usual self-occupied fashion If the little hostess expected compliment on her scones and broiled pigeons, she was disappointed

“Are all things ready for your journey ? ” he demanded abruptly

“I would I were as ready for heaven,” the girl answered in her careless way, dashed by the Covenantant’s stern look of reprobation “Truly,” she went on with a timidity foreign to her, “there’s a pair of saddle-bags stuffed tight as a man fits his hosen, and the rest is cosy under the big apple-tree in the loanin’ The clan will hardly stretch claw to the household plenishing, when I am once beyond reach ! ”

“Have you beasts for the road ? ”

“Ay, have I My father’s Buid Ellen and my own Come-carry-me, forbye a jennet for the packs ”

"Go gather the household together, then I would ask a blessing on our out-setting"

Clear Havens' daughter smiled, as one hearing a familiar language denied since some time to her ears. The household gathered together, reverence contending with pleasure in their faces.

Yet, as the orphan stood with gold head bowed, a disappointment grew on her. Long was the prayer, but the simple directness of dead Clear Havens' usage was wanting from it. Major Weir prayed that the company grouped about him might be kept from money-lust or double-dealing, that their hands might be held from violence or deeds of blood, but at the last Chrystal was fain to whisper through the effective periods her girl's petition for a Father's protection and love in the new chapter of her life. The child's trusting confidence was in her face when she raised it, but Major Weir's prayer had left her cold.

Weir lifted his head at last, and turned to the consideration of lading the horses with the methodical business-air in which he had despatched breakfast and led the worship. As the strong imperious voice sounded over the courtyard, Chrystal lingered in the parlour, taking dumb wistful farewell of the place that had witnessed her happy dead days.

Touching the furniture with swift little caresses, she came to a stand by the window, the landscape without dazzling through the tears that blinded the grey eyes. Oh, fields and hills! where he who would never come again had walked with her, memory laid a hurt in each green familiar place!

Yet as Chrystal Hope stood in the sunny window, in sheer pain clenching her hands hard upon the black staff, which Major Weir in a forgetfulness had left lying on the window-seat, the bittersweet of memory grew strangely overlaid. Thoughts which made the girl shudder at herself came unbidden, wild subtle suggestions of evil, trending she knew not where, crowded thick and fast in upon her.

Starting, as a sleeper wrenches himself from nightmare, Chrystal dropped her eyes on the staff in her

hands All her Lowland superstition was in force in the conviction that stormed her, that a witchcraft hung about the carved black wood

Scarcely knowing what she did, she fled *but* to the deserted kitchen A great turf-fire burnt upon the hearthstone

Acting on impulse, she thrust the end of the staff she had carried at arm's length into the caverns of clear redness As she did it, a cry rose up, distant as the whaups calling on the moorland, rending as legend would make the cry of the mandrake

"Coming! I am coming!"

The voice which but that instant had been loud in the court-yard, sounded at hand Major Weir, panting in an evident disorder, burst into the kitchen-place

"I am coming!" he cried again

But Chrystal had not summoned him

CHAPTER IV

A MAN, TAWNY

“WHO—or what?”

The words burst from Chrystal's ashen lips, but her own voice sounded faint in her ears for the roaring as of great oceans that filled them. Her knees weak as water, she leant against the wall that had hemmed her first backward leap, trembling before the man who in the moment of entrance had plucked his property from the burning, and now stood confronting her with his heavy stare.

“What freak is this, girl? How had you the boldness to meddle with my belongings, and why cried you out on me?” he asked sternly.

“The fearsome skreigh well-nigh frightened soul from body o' me,” Chrystal faltered. “It seemed—seemed”—

Her voice refused the words on her lips, though the man's unwavering look challenged them.

“I heard a call, and hastened hither,” said he insistently. “Truly the wind on these moors has strange tricks, yet methought the cry I heard seemed more than a skirl of wind.”

The silence of Chrystal's shudder was broken. A sound, a lamenting voice, thrilled over the loaming, a sound broken as if by running, nearing quickly.

The judicial attitude of the man standing in the glow of the turfs appeared to have gained a rigidity to it. As the girl raised her head listening, he too shot a look that was startled through the half-open door behind his back, the quiet of one waiting on the turn of Fate's finger thereafter descending upon him. So, the two

A confused noise broke in upon the shrieks almost at the doorstone. Voices pitched in various keys played through and around them—exclaiming, chiding, sympathising—to deafening. The full kitchen-menie streamed through the doorway in a seething mob, from which a single figure burst, to fling herself at Chrystal's feet in a wild supplication.

"Mistress Chrystal! Mistress Chrystal!" she shrieked, "Blind Hughie's lost on me! Mistress Chrystal, ye ken the wean has ne'er his lealong life left the loanin', and is aye run-running back to his mammy's skirts! Eh, Mistress Chrystal, the wee lad, and him blind, and the fricht that the fremd gentle put on him makin' him maybe start awa' to the hill, to fa' and nick his craig like the strayed lambs! And oh, Mistress Chrystal, men harder than the hill-stones are oot an' about, an' no later than the Borrowing Days o' March the young laird swore to thraw his neck for him, for that the wean, when he set him to read the crystal, told him that he that suld pit the ring on your middle finger, by his tawny hair an' eyes, was ne'er a Hope o' them a'!"

During the torrent of passionate speech the tide of Chrystal's blood had turned from ebb, as though a terrible ghost of thought had been laid by the woman's voice, her face had regained its warm whiteness. She stooped over the kneeler, patting her into silence.

"Esmé harm a blind bairn, Marget! I'd wed Sandy sooner than I'd crede yon!"

"We waste time!" Major Weir's strong voice overrode the chorus of excitement. "Peace thee, woman! the noise of your screaming is more like to fley the child than to find him."

"Ay, hush ye, poor Marget!" Chrystal added coaxingly. "If it had been an hour or twain nearer the gloaming, myself would have been nigh taking your shrieks for the Taran, the ghost of the unbaptized babe who, folks say, wanders over the moorland weeping. Whisht ye, and go call Hughie from the burn, he'll maybe"—

Major Weir's hand came on her shoulder, breaking her from the woman clinging to her

"Girl, if I am chargeable for your safety we must be clear of the hills before dusk' Dally not, *but come!*"

The stiness of departure numbed the pain as the mistress of Clear Havens went out from it. One by one the last sight of loving faces became a memory, slowly the old grey house drew back from view. For a space Chrystal rode, turned in her saddle, straining ear for a lull in Marget's wail, but the heart-broken sound persisted till it was no louder than a bee's hum.

The heath and coarse grasses had ceased under the horses' feet before Major Weir altered a whit of his forward riding attitude. The hills were drawing back, but the lower cliffs were about them still, curving in the travellers' road into a sombre amphitheatre of glen, clasping a small tarn. Between the rock wall and the water the bridle-path niched itself, sometimes stooping to the lip of the pool, again climbing in and out among the scattered grey boulders, as if anxious to escape to cover from some pursuing foe. Clematis and briar tangled themselves in a green brake over the steep walls, a splash, followed by widening rings and an arrow-head lengthening from the shore, told of an otter having missed his prey.

As they came into the place, a grim smile twisted Major Weir's lips, his eye recognising the fitness of it for the ambush of which the young spark of the diamonds had spoken. Half a mile back he had loosed the pistols in his holster, now he rode with head bent for the listening, looking out in his stealthy usual from under lowered eyelids.

The smile on the soldier's lip grew more scornful when the glen proved to have been suspected in vain, the horses breaking out on the open that sloped to the highway below. The long northern twilight had scarcely mustered forth from the cave of night, the travellers showed clearly through the

rosy-tasselled larches and Norway pines at march over the upland

"A Chrystal! A Chrystal!"

Through the trees a mad little rush came upon the peaceful two, the leader still shouting his war-cry in falsetto. Two, three, and four, they rode at the light form in the camlet riding-cloak, but Come-carry-me proved equal to the occasion. Bucking sideways, his nimble hoofs twinkled past the attack, the wind carried back upon it his rider's laughter.

"Help! Help!"

Chrystal, pivoting Come-carry-me smartly on his haunches, checked her laughter to give the cry. In front, making Embro'-wards, a horseman was riding, not so far in front that he did not swing his beast round at the call. With help approaching at the gallop, Chrystal pointed Come-carry-me's wise rough head for the hill again, breasting it with all the speed that lay in the sheltie's four hillbred legs.

The sixty seconds that the assault had lasted had unpleasantly the air of being Jock the Dandy's last seconds on earth. With pistols levelled, Major Weir was edging round the group of his assailants, who, attack on their part turned to defence, was each in turn incontinently shifting from the nostrils of death, breathing chill on them in the shining barrels. If Chrystal had ridden with a barleycorn more weight, one of Major Weir's secret bargainers would have been made a silent man for ever.

Chrystal flashed into the scene as the dark man first got Dandy Jock fairly covered. At an unhesitating tug of the rein, Come-carry-me skurried into bullet-range, his mistress bestowing a smart cut with her riding-switch on the youth she screened.

"Ye doited gowk, take your paiks!" she cried. "Your head's turned by thae romaunts o' yours, to spend powder and shot on ye would be a clear waste when there's willow-wands to the fore!"

Under the stinging blows and tongue, the striver after romance was fairly beaten from the field. As Weir's severe countenance showed beyond the flutter

of the camlet cloak, Chrystal's admirer fled frankly, beating his horse on with the flat of the sword with which he had promised to strike gently.

His men, three in all, were not of much better metal than their master. Major Weir turning, saw them all three at shortsword with the stranger whom Chrystal's cries had invoked, a man who seemed not at all embarrassed by his odds. The blade in a master's hand appeared at play with those out against it, it glinted as it wheeled and parried, attacking and defending with flickering swiftness. Burd Ellen had not had time to advance a forefoot of reinforcement, when the fellows broke ground before the terrible swordsman, to clatter away with discomfited curses in the wake of their master.

Passing his finger along the edge of his Toledo, the stranger surveyed the figures advancing upon him with no interest at all. Chrystal in her eagerness was the first to reach him, noting with girlish approving a handsome bronzed face of tawny colouring.

"Faith, sir, your blade flickered like the Merry Dancers of a winter sky!" she cried in her way of frank good-fellowship.

A bow, slight as courtesy could well make it, answered her, the gentleman passing on his glance to Major Weir before it could have so much as told him the colour of the tricky grey eyes. The girl that a full clan was courting felt such indifference aggrieve, but her irresistible good temper listened eagerly for the voice that should answer her guardian's staid acknowledgments.

"'Tis nothing to say grace over!" The voice, unmistakably of breeding, was brief. "A man must answer a woman's call, specially when it promises the chance of a fight. Yon flurry of swords, though, was scarcely worthy of so good a name."

"If you are for Edinburgh, sir, we might ride together," Major Weir proposed sedately. "We shall not clog you in your going, myself must be there with the dawn."

"I am for Edinburgh," the stranger assented, his handsome face clouding with a certain pain to the grey eyes watching. Silently he pulled his horse into the pace set by Burd Ellen and her stable-comrade, and silently the three took the road again.

The beat of the horses' hoofs fused the miles of going behind them into bronzed distance, the blue of lint meadows on either hand of the road slowly lost colour with the twilight, the yellow gorse made itself known alone by the honey sweetness that the travellers breathed. Batches of heavily cawing crows streamed overhead in their homing, dropping cheeps from the bushes told of ruffled bunches of feather-life settling to the sleeping, ramparted by their thorn fortress from Master Owl-o'-the-Night. A small rain was putting out the stars that had taken courage to glint in the first of the gloaming, the wet soil began to ball the beasts' hoofs, muffling the sound of their passing.

"Is it true, sir, that the Marquess of Montrose suffers to-morrow?"

Chrystal, riding in the sudden depression of her Celtic temperament, glanced up. In the domino of twilight faces could not be seen, but the stranger's voice had spoken to her ear of a stern grief.

"The Malignant, James Grahame, suffers the doom of his sins on the morrow," returned Major Wen.

The horse on Chrystal's left curveted as if in answer to a movement of his rider's bridle-hand.

"Would it be possible, think you, for a friend to obtain speech, if but for five minutes and on the scaffold's self, with the Marquess?"

"No, sir! Godly ministers alone will be suffered near him, if perchance repentance may be granted at the eleventh hour to their intercessions for the godless traitor!"

"Your pardon, sir, but I scarce comprehend by what right one fighting on his King's commission is branded by such a name," retorted the other, the sternness of tone making his words ring like crossing swords.

"Sir, the Commissioners would know how to help your comprehension, did they hear those words," Weir responded unmovedly "Before I broke up from Embro', one was fastened by his tongue to the gibbet at the Cross and scourged heartily for no more than having drunk drinks to James Grahame"

"The Kirk has proved herself an apt scholar of Rome in the gentle art of persecution!" sneered the other "Ministers of religion have aye whited their consciences, if not saved their souls, by making their side the only right one—'tis a trick of the trade!"

"Sir, 'tis a word with one minister at St Andrew's that the north wind of persecution yet bloweth out of the air where lies heaven!" Chrystal put in, in a quick averting of further friction "Your friend's passing may be stormy, yet if he suffer for well-doing, good Master Rutherford would tell you, that One will, on the shore, welcome the seasick passenger!"

"Silence, jade!" commanded Major Weir "Take shame for being so pert in a stranger's company!"

Come-carry-me picked up his head. The horse on his left had broken out in a fiery, lashing his hoofs hither and thither like flails. Through the dusk Chrystal could dimly discern his rider sitting like a rock, knees of iron and wrists of steel controlling the creature's restiveness, though it did not come to a close for long enough. The riders rode on silent.

Black night was at its blackest on the land when the gloom began to be pricked by the twinkling of stars, shining too low for those of the sky. In assembling multitude they pierced the dark, giving token of houses somewhere behind the dark, as the actions of men give tokens of the characters that would go unguessed at but for them. Chrystal felt a great town crowding upon her, before the line of a wall loomed before her, black upon black.

"Who are ye who would win through the Bristol Port after the Lady's Bell has gone three hours and

more ' ' demanded the watch upon Major Weir's strong call

"Major Wen of the City Guard ' "

The curt answer was the sesame to unclose the postern, through which the little company defiled. Major Weir cast a quick glance back at their travelling-companion, but offered no hindrance to his entering with them, and the three continued for some moments longer through the streets stragglingly lighted by the *bowats* which it was law for householders to keep alight on their housefronts. In spite of the lateness a strange wakefulness was abroad in the streets, figures flitting over the turnstile stairs or through the moulded doorways of the tall "lands," in defiance of the forty bell-strokes that had warned all good citizens to earth at ten o'clock.

"They rise early to miss nothing of the raree-show, which the Kirk affords in the place of the Maypoles and Hogmanay junketings that have been made sin ' " observed the stranger. "The *deid-chack* that the Assembly will sit down to after they have rid themselves by murder of the enemy whom they could not conquer, will be sweeter in their mouths than the plum-porridge which their Christianity starts back from ' "

"Our roads part here," Major Weir returned sombrely.

Chrystal would fain have given a hand of farewell to the man about, as she half-divined, to enter on one of the passion-hours of life, but he, surveying with a bitter smile the hurrying of folk converging with an odd magnetic effect towards a common point somewhere out of sight, vouchsafed no notice of her gesture. With a tinge of disappointment the girl righted herself in the saddle, following her guardian through wynds that seemed mere crevices between overhanging houses, till at last, by Major Wen drawing bridle, she guessed that she stood on the threshold of her new home.

A passage of a gloom so narrow that it brought a suffocation to the child of the moorland, pierced a front building with a tunnel, through which the

Weir "land" was reached Chrystal, groping blind in the darkness, heard the strong tread of Major Weir on the courtyard long before she stumbled out upon it, her breath came more freely for the outleaping on the dark of a lantern-flame held by the tall, grey-haired woman within the house-door.

The hood half-fallen off from the gold hair, the girl dawned out of the night, lifting her mouth with the child's confidence for the kisses with which elder women readily salute their lost youth in younger faces, but the woman Grizel's greeting was of a strangely different fashion. Catching the slight creature's shoulders, her eyes stabbed the innocent face set in the fair hair, scanning it from brow to chin before she pushed the girl from her.

"Her innocence can dare to tell her dreams, brother!" she said. "How comes she to mate with us?"

"A truce to your folly!" Major Weir's harsh voice increased the forlornness making prey of the girl. "Show the maid to her chamber, doubtless you have made one ready against her coming."

The woman laughed.

"Oh ay! I made ready when I saw her coming. Three ye came, but two ye are!"

A shiver crisped Chrystal's flesh at the strange tone, but she put questionings by for the present. The women were half-way up the stair when Major Weir, turning back to the horses waiting without the passage-way, spoke again—

"Put the travel-stains from you, girl, and ready you to come forth at call."

"Come forth? Are we not at your house then?"

"Ay. But I would not that one of my household should be lacking to witness the triumph of the Parliament over the traitor Grahame!"

Chrystal clenched her hand, scarcely knowing whence the sudden sense of partisanship that stained her whiteness with angry colour had arisen. The wilful little heiress of Clear Havens tossed her curly head, promising herself that she at least would not

make one of a pack gloating over the finish of a doomed man. Thinking such thoughts confusedly, she turned from her pause, longing for nothing so much as a speedy downlying. A dizziness had come upon her, her feet had an odd sensation of going down instead of up on the stair beneath. She was debtor to the carved side-rail for support as she followed Grizel to a chamber hung with tarnished gilt leather, her guide leaving her there without any breaking of her morose silence.

Pressing brave little hands on her breast to press back rising sobs, the weary girl threw herself into the shadow-gulf of the carved bed sunk in the wall. Very quickly the eyelids, heavy with travel-toil, drooped over the sorrowful eyes, sleep sound and kind blurred with its sponge the thronging events of the day into a soothing medley, the lips that had been set to endure found their smile again.

What was it that troubled the peace of the child sleeping? Like a shadow on a sunny meadow, a fear drifted over the girl's face, sweat, like the thunder-drops heralded by the shadow, started on the broad, low brow. Chrystal dreamed, and moaned in her dream, numbed as she was to that dark bed about which the air had, to the sleeper, grown hot and blasting, while slow by the carved bedside swept a train of shadows—girls clutching at the snoods falling from the hair about their tear-wept faces, men and women pointing to black, strangled throats or to blood dripping on their garments, great uncouth beasts that ran among the shadows with dumb eyes that were eloquent of wrong.

Merciful Heaven! who was this who showed suddenly? Blind Hughie the See-er, with water drenching hair and dress, and the little hands fighting the air as one downing buffets for his life. No wound was his to mark him as walking of right in that fearful fellowship of suffering, only the slow dripping, and the look of terror, and the muddy smear on the little tender mouth, as though a strong and cruel grip had pressed down the child-face into

a wet place, to hold it there till the beating of the little helpless hands was still

And now, on the heels of Blind Hughie, had come a gentleman of very gallant carriage, with his curled head held high in defiance of the hempen tow about his neck,—but the terror of the dream shattered the dreaming. With a wild shriek Chrystal wrenched herself from her sleep, leaping from the bed that gave such frightful dreams, to sink on her knees and bury her face in shuddering hands

A rap, heavy and imperative, fell upon her door. Major Weir, without, gazed in displeasure on the gul as she opened, with disarranged travelling-dress and wind-blown hair

“I looked to find you ready busked,” he reproved. “Delay no longer, but ready yourself against the next summons”

Confronted by the strong personality of the man, Chrystal’s resolve fell from her, though once she opened lips for a plain refusal, and again to make mention of the dream that still thrilled terror through her veins. An unreasoning fear rushed in upon her, making her glad to shut out the dark unyielding man, even though she bound up the wilful gold hair afresh, and put on her town dools, with fingers that shook to the spoiling of their nimbleness. The stress of the dream was on her, but the pallor it had brought did no worse than make the face in its black hood of a wind-flower delicacy, and deepen the grey eyes into depths of black. The dissatisfaction on Major Weir’s countenance passed before his second scrutinising survey of his charge, but he merely waved her down the staircase on which Grizel, cloaked and hooded, was silently waiting

A weeping day had broken for some hours on the world as the three emerged on the West Bow. The strong current of passers-by setting face one and all westwards, swept up the group with it like straws on the tide. Chrystal, as she passed under the arched gateway in the wall cutting the steep street with its line, wondered at the pale multitude of faces

thronging window and projecting balcony, with eyes turned to the oblong space on to which the crowd was flowing, the great stark gallows lifting its thirty feet to the clouds big with storm, like an avenging finger that called down vengeance on a great crime

The sullen surge of a bank of drums from the ridge of the High Street above, drowned Chrystal's sigh of horror. Major Weir turned his womenkind abruptly from the press, directing them on a gabled house where already Clear Havens' daughter had cast curious eyes, wondering in her Covenanted upbringing at the iron cross surmounting it, marking it, for anyone not born and bred out of Edinburgh town, as property of old-time signing and sealing to the Knights Templars. As Chrystal passed over the threshold, she had time to read the legend scored deep upon the lintel—"He Yt Tholis Overcomis"

The women, headed by their austere conductor, passed into a great room on the second floor, its balcony square to the gibbet and the yeasty crowd.

"Bide you here till I come for you!" Major Weir gave curt command, and departed.

Chrystal moved restlessly through her sudden prison. The silence of the lofty room, in contrast with the dull roar from the multitude without, affected her oddly, bringing a fancy of a launch upon some resistless wave sweeping strongly and swiftly to a shattering danger whose thunder warned ceaselessly. The strange Grizel had seated herself, falling to spinning on the small distaff which she produced beneath her cloak, as though the fates of men lay in the threads lengthening in her flitting fingers. A half-hour and more had gone by before Chrystal had taken courage to address her.

"What spin you for?" she asked at last.

The woman looked up, flinging the untamable wildness of her glance like a blow at the girl.

"I spin sins for the world!" she said, her shuttle seeming to keep time with the words. "New sins! Strong sins! But the world wants them faster than I can spin!"

She span even faster as she spoke, heedless of Chrystal's startled retreat to the farthest limits of the room. The girl's thought was in full cry to the Lammermuirs, already the dangers she had fled from seemed less than the bodements of her self-chosen place of refuge, the bold sinner Esmé better to do with than the secret man whom she had conjured up against him.

The click of the shuttle on the flooring had not ceased, when the sense of another presence in the room came upon the girl. She turned quickly. A gentleman in a dress rich, in spite of studied sobriety, was standing at her elbow, surveying her with eyes that squinted.

"By whose favour come you here, pretty maid?" he demanded.

"Major Weir bade me await him here." It was the little mistress of Clear Havens who spoke, the whole of her girlish dignity in the clear voice and fearless eyes that met his.

"You are sib to my good friend Weir?"

"Be thankit!"—the exclamation escaped Chrystal before she knew,—“I am daughter to an old comrade of him, and am but come to taily with him for a while.”

The cross eyes were scanning the pure skin, the slim waist, the foot and hand made for sonnets.

"To pick up a sweetheart in Edinburgh town?"

"To throw them off, sir! Lovers to me are like breeks to a Highlandman—made to be got rid of!"

A bewitching dimple showed in Chrystal's cheek, the lovely face flashed with fun. The squinting eyes upon her began to gain a certain content.

"What's wrong with the men, lassie?"

"Maybe 'tis original sin, sir! That—and the fault in their hearing that winna take *No* for an answer!"

"If I were a lass, I wouldn't give the same answer to all the gallants!"

A rose-leaf red had fallen upon each of Chrystal's cheeks, her eyes, deepened to black, looked straight at him—

"If you were a lass, sir, would you have ought

but the finger of scorn for gallants who, if you hinged your money-bags about the bogle in the barley, would be as brisk in their courting of its bogleship as ever they were of you ? ”

“ By my faith, the butter flavours well ! ” the gentleman remarked enigmatically “ Well, my pretty lass, if you think so ill of men already, ’twill be no news to you that, run well run ill, ’tis a pack that’s bad to throw off the scent of money-bags ! ”

“ Eh, sir ! Isnor that why I’m here ? ”

The death of the colour in the girl’s face showed that the hint had gone home

“ Edinburgh’s no the ark of refuge, my dove ! There’ll be but one in Scotland who could hold you safe from those you fear ”

“ His name, sir ! ”

The glaed-eyed speaker shook his head

“ ’Tis not a name wise to speak at the present But so much I will tell you, if by day or night one shows you this token, you will do well to follow his bidding, for he will bring you to the face you see here ”

He drew forth a medallion as he spoke, letting Chrystal see the countenance of a swaithy youth, somewhat heavy in the jaw, with the laughter-line round full lips and a freakish light in black eyes

As the girl looked, the stillness of the room was stirred by a sound without, a groan breaking along the crowd

A venomous look stole over the man’s face, the venom of the snake slaving his victim

“ I must go ! ” he muttered hastily “ By now the traitor has come forth, and it must be seen to that the drums are in readiness to drown his voice, for none understandeth more damnably than he to make guilt play the part of innocence ! You, child, be silent on what has passed between us, even to Weir ! ”

With his brushing from the room, Chrystal turned to the space without As she came round a screen of painted leather set against draughts from the window, she came face to face with a stranger woman standing on the wide balcony

CHAPTER V

THE PASSING OF THE GREAT MARQUESS

PERPLEXED by a look that met hers like a sword drawn on hei, Chrystal gave back slightly. The bold eyes of the unknown lady mustered her, figure and face, before she threw herself back against the shutter with a buist of laughter.

"So that's the King's Butter!" she cried. "Why, 'tis a Flanders baby, a doll to amuse the bairn whose nursery 'tis my good uncle's tent to guide!"

Chrystal scarcely heard hei. The crowd, stern-faced to a man, was being kneaded into compactness by the red-coated Town Guard, clearing a broad pathway to the gallows-tree. Silence, the silence of those watching a dying, had come to the multitude, the rain that drove its long lances through the people was powerless to cover a head of those reverently bared.

A music of drums and pipes surged in upon the silence. Over the cleared space figures began to flit: ministers in the primness of gown and bands, bailties with pursiness of office, cruel-faced men with a sanctimonious set of self-conscious features. One by one they found place on the platforms raised near the gibbet, and the music, ever nearer, shocked through the dumb waiting of the crowd.

"Ha! there the traitor comes! Oh, the good day for the House of Argyle that sees its enemy made crowsmeat of!"

The woman, who had pressed to Chrystal's side, cried it aloud, and beat her plump white hands together, but Chrystal, leaning over the balcony, took no heed. For down the road of death a gentleman

of very gallant carriage was stepping, holding his head high as he held it in her dream

"Who is yon, for God's sake?"

Chrystal asked it in a tremulous whisper, clutching at the other's arm. Lady Jean Gordon dragged it free, pointing at the figure advancing firmly and gracefully as in the presence-chamber of a king

"Montrose the traitor! Montrose the hirer of Irish cut-throats! Montrose the rebel to the League!" she screamed in a voice vibrating with spite, and spat upon the Marquess

"Fie, Jezebel! 'Twould better become yourself to take the place of shame this day for your adulteries!" a voice out of the crowd rang to her. Chrystal, dizzy with fear and fierce pity, recognised in the speaker the stern handsome man who had parted where their ways divided in the rainy dawn

A burst of sunshine had swept aside the curtains of the rain. The light fell on the gallant figure walking among his enemies with the forward-reaching look of one who glimpses through the night of a forest the conquering beams of day upon the shining of a delightful land. When, in a later time, Chrystal, in the window-seat that looked to the hills from Clear Havens, read of one Mr Valiant-for-Truth's passage to the City Celestial, the face that rose before her was that of the Marquess of Montrose

A crow of infant laughter fell across the silence that the drums had ceased to daunt. From its mother's shoulder a baby stretched fat hands to the shining silver lace on the scarlet habit worn by the Marquess, Chrystal from her vantage could see the smile with which he glanced back at it—the child beginning life's voyage, the man almost in port!

They had gathered about him, kites on a fallen lion, fanatical ministers urging their Shibboleth, painting God as different in nothing but power from themselves. The aristocrat was in the gesture with which he put them by, but as the hand of the hangman

came about his neck, crushing the rich laces with the wrappings that his foes extended their grudge to, he sifted the crowd about him with a swift glance. The sullenness of the brute that knows itself over-matched was upon its passivity, the bystanders had closed in upon the man who had been bold enough to voice their mind, cautiously, irresistibly sweeping him from sight.

"Sir! sir!" Chrystal was leaning far over the balcony, stretching out both hands in the passionate woman-chivalry that champions the losing side. "*He that tholes, overcomes!*"

The eyes that had searched for a friend came in a quick smile to the quivering, sweet girl-face, fearlessly raised above the words, clear for the seeing, on the lintel. Montrose touched the ignominy about his neck, as though laying hand on what a king had borne before him.

"I did not feel more honoured when His Majesty sent me the Garter!"

The Marquess' voice, very kind, rose to the balcony. Jean Gordon drew hissing breath.

"Thanks be! my uncle has let the music loose!" she muttered, sending a baleful glance at Chrystal.

The rolling thunder of the drums had broken into storm again, the keen wailing of the pipes flickering through it. For a moment the doomed Marquess remained with the proud port of the lion at bay, then, to eyes of Chrystal in her passionated watch on the balcony, a sudden recollection troubled his serenity. Putting those about him carelessly back, he passed to the side of the man standing immutable as Atropos behind him, laying his hand in its white glove on the shoulder of Major Weir.

The dark man raised his arm with an imperative gesture. Lull in storm, the music fell silent. Major Weir's voice, carefully mellowed, came to Chrystal's ears—

"Journeying thus to Judgment as ye are, would you that I or another of the godly men about you shall entreat mercy on your soul?"

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The Marquess' smile of denial had a touch of bitterness

"No, truly, sir! A servant of King Charles could not crave such"—he made a pregnant pause—"honours among his enemies!"

With the last words uttered in a raised distinct tone, he stepped back, his eyes ceasing to search the crowd. The instruments had blared out feverishly upon the firm voice, they bayed like death-hounds about the man as he bent his head and veiled his eyes, yet the hush of prayer seemed to spread even to the edges of the great crowd.

The petty malice that denied him the shelter of a cloak in the rain beginning to drift down again was received with the aristocrat's indifference, the few steps to the tall ladder were trod by the figure with the lovelocks of the Cavalier falling over scarlet braveries in the ardour of the soldier on parade.

A heaving in one corner of the crowd broke the tension. From her place Chrystal turned her eyes, to see Jean Gordon's contemner putting out the strength in him, striving and striving again against the stolidity that baffled him from breaking through to the gallows-tree and him standing there. Tawny hair flung back from his set face, his eyes met the girl's in a sudden confluent flash, alone, united in their passionate helplessness, each divined a comrade.

The man standing on death's threshold had noted the disturbance. With a gleam in his eyes he wheeled again, once more deliberately stretching out his hand to Major Weir's shoulder, as, with the guard, the master-jailor followed up his prisoner's steps in a grim tinchel, to drive him to his death.

That the repeated gesture held a significance none could doubt. For one mad moment Chrystal's heart bounded with the hope of a rescue-signal, then it seemed to drop, stonelike.

The sword of a straggling sunbeam fell, like an accolade of heaven, on the shoulder of the stately figure setting face to climb the ladder, tall as that of Jacob's dream.

A gloom to be felt swept down on the world there—after, thunder voiced wrath through the air Men's faces, faces that looked to earth, gathered blackness, and Chrystal, on her knees on the balcony, wept and prayed But Montrose had stepped into the River—and so, across

CHAPTER VI

THE LOCKED CHALMER

THE Grassmarket was empty when Chrystal uncovered her face. Like snow in thaw, the crowd had melted, swelling the wynds and closes channeling the town as melting snow swells the brooks.

Slowly the girl rose from where she had crouched. Gazing at the teeming thunder-rain she could have believed the long lurid afternoon a dream, save for the great grim Tree of Death that loomed up before her, hanging such grisly fruitage to the rain.

Shutting out the sight with shaking hands, she staggered back into the room, where Grizel sat still upon the settle, spinning as though a murdered life was as light a matter as a broken thread. At the step beside her she glanced up.

"Ye're weary o' the ploy?" she said, beginning to order her cloak for departure. "That madam wi' the follow-me-lad eyes in her head brushed awa' in haste, she couldna longer tarry from the junketings of this wedding-week in Lady Home's Lodging. We'll away down to the doorstone, and await the coming o' brother Thomas there."

The women left the chamber, perceiving as they set foot upon the stairway Major Weir entering from the street, together with the gladd-eyed gentleman with whom Chrystal had spoken, and who appeared to have been shedding tears.

"Rehearse me no more, Weir," he was saying. "Truly, in going out of this world James Grahame showed some resolution, though it will avail him nothing in entering another."

"If the head is to remain safe from his friends

on the Tolbooth, 'twould be well an your lordship ordained a new cross-prick of iron on the gavel-spike," responded Major Weir. His companion nodded, turning back at the suggestion to the street.

Weir took no heed of Chrystal's shrinking gesture, as he marshalled her and his sister with staid composure. The girl, weary with her travel, stayed her steps unwillingly when, breasting the steepness of the Bow, they were joined by some acquaintance.

"This is a great day for Edinburgh, Major Weir!" a man observed. Chrystal, indignant over his tone of suppressed exultation, started at the unexpected reply.

"Friend, let the judgment of the Lord pass in silence! It is a fearful thing to put hand or finger to the taking of man's life, to my office as Captain of the City Guard alone I owe it that I saw what I saw to-day."

"Major Weir, Major Weir, the rebuke is just!" cried the man. "Man, had I a tenth part of your loving-kindness I would have stirred no foot abroad to-day!"

The terms in which she had been commanded to witness the Parliament's triumph rang in Chrystal's ears, but her bewilderment was unformulated.

"Ay, Thomas Weir, an' I have my guess on what ye were speakin' wi' my Lord Argyle the noo," the matron of the party asserted. "Angelical Thomas will do his endeavours, quo' I, to save siccan a goodly gallant the bein' hacked in gobbets!"

"Nay, Mistress Elspie, my endeavour concerned but the head," returned Major Weir in his most mellow voice. Chrystal was yet rallying her senses when the woman turned upon herself.

"Eh, lass!" she cried, "ye're favoured to have houseroom wi' siccan a man! Never a harsh word or act or thought proceeding frae him, there's no' a marrow for Major Weir, forbye it's the angels!"

With the last words in her ears, Chrystal stumbled through the darkness of the passage leading to the house that she had claimed for home. Mistress Elspie's enthusiasm had brought some comfort to

her girlish innocence, it set her wits to reconciling two such different, as what she had seen and what she had heard of her father's friend. In the face of his declaration of reluctance to witness the execution, upright Clear Havens' daughter told herself that the harshness with which Major Weir had bidden his household accompany him behoved to be the mask of pain, that his suggestion to Argyle could only have been prompted by the sense of duty strong upon the soldier.

Such excuses, joined to bodily weakness, made her tolerably at ease at the meal laid by Grizel, in the long chamber with the chalk-line across its floor. Brother and sister ate their food silently, yet they served their young guest hospitably enough, Major Weir once rising to set a pitcher of milk near to her hand.

"'Twill keep your skin whiter than wine or ale," he said. Chrystal chid herself for the impression that his care had been that for a marketable commodity.

Weighted with mortal fatigue, she fell asleep almost in the moment of laying herself in the great gloomy bed. But sleep was no friend to-night. As though they had lain in wait for her, the fearful train of shadows took up their circlings about the bedside,—Blind Hughie fending fear from him, Montrose pointing towards herself as though warning her back from an edge of peril.

Chrystal's shriek rang through and through the sleeping house, as in white fluttering night-trail she rushed from the bed, the room. Draughts cold on the slender body had scarcely wakened her as she sped over the stairs to the chamber of the supper-table, to find Grizel, distaff in hand, seated by the belated embers calmly, as though the shriek of a girl's terror was no new thing in the grim, withdrawn house.

With the self-control of her Covenanted upbringing, Chrystal choked the cries back in her throat. A touch of childish shamefastness came upon her,

confessing her flight to the tall gaunt woman, but her refusal to re-enter the bed that was ambush of such evil dreams was none the less passionate

"Let me lie wi' you!" she entreated, catching at Grizel's restless hands "Ye won't miss the space, I'll ne'er buff nor styne the lealong night!"

At sight of the tiny barefoot creature, fair curls sleep-tossed about the innocent frightened face, a certain kindness crept into the woman's look. She rose, laying thin tense fingers on Chrystal's wrist

"Will ye swear to bring a drop o' water to me in my torment?" she asked, bending close to the girl

With a pitying impulse, Chrystal laid her arms about the other's waist, pressing her lips on the cheek of the brainsick woman

"I will aye do all I can for you," she said "Put such fearsome thoughts from ye, they come wi' your biding so lealone in this dark house, and would take French leave had I ye once on the lawns o' Clear Havens"

Grizel straightened herself with a sombre smile

"Can Clear Havens cheat hell of its teind?" she muttered "Poor wean, who would kiss away the seven deadlies as a mother kisses the place to make it well, she would do the best she can for me, so I'll do the best I can for her"

She selected a key from a bunch at her girdle, and beckoned the girl to follow from the room. Chrystal's limbs shook as she slipped in her wake down the strangely vibrating staircase, but Grizel kept on, turning into a passage-way at right angles to the entrance from the court. At a closed door she stopped, fitting the key she carried into the lock

"Enter!" she said, pushing Chrystal forward "Ye must dress and order the chalmers yourself, for there's *that* on the threshold keeps me out!"

With her harsh laugh she receded, leaving the light she had held in Chrystal's hand. The flame shone on a withered twig of rowan-tree, bound about with red thread, laid upon the step leading down into the chamber, with a thrill the Lowland girl remem-

bered the property ascribed to it of keeping witches to their distance

The room in which she found herself was very dusty. Thick layers of moulder were on all the furniture, Chrystal's steps printed themselves upon the flooring. That the room had been arranged in imitation of some other did not strike Chrystal, considering the crowding of its furniture, till later, though even now she noted chairs standing awry, and a Bible open on the faded cushion of the window-seat, as though the tenant of the chamber had but left it for an instant.

But neither dust nor strangeness could keep sleep longer aloof that night. Creeping under the dusty bed-coverings, Chrystal slept before she was aware, so deeply as only to awaken with the hour-high sunshine striking its arrows at her defying eyelids. For a moment she lay, wondering at the arras hangings, the Flanders chairs and say cushions, then, with a quick curiosity, she sprang up to face the new day.

The day was long. For awhile the girl-creature kept weariness at bay as she fitted to and fro in dainty housewifery, till the dusty room was dusty no longer, though with instinctive tact she left all in its former orderings. But these occupations failed. Man or mouse was not to be heard stirring in the old house, the stillness of which dared Chrystal to a voyage of discovery, the click of her heels in her explorings thrilling her with fancies of steps invisible keeping pace.

Upstairs and down went the restless feet, sometimes at a trick of the girl-fancy running to port in her own chamber, to venture forth again with fresh courage. A certain air of mystery hung like an atmosphere over the retired house, encouraged, it might seem, by doors set in panellings over which the hand strayed in vain questing for latch or handle, by mirrors shining from dark corners, by little stairs that hinted of unseen comings and goings. Outside one door the bourdon of a persistent spinning-wheel droned through the still house, but though the girl, drawn by the spell of the un-

known, crept more times than once to the doorsill, no breathing-space came in the unseen spinner's industry. The humming wheel and the tapping heels were the only sounds through the whole rambling place, of which, so far as Chrystal could discern, the strange brother and sister were sole inhabitants, one or two rooms alone appearing garnished to their use, others heaped from floor to ceiling with mouldering piles of wool, moth-eaten by storage. Loud and soft, near and far, the buzz of the wheel sounded like the swarming of a hive.

From the main staircase, with its inexplicable vibrations, two passages branched, the one leading to Chrystal's chamber, the other, on the right of the ascending flight, blocked also by a denying door. Discouraged in her hope of an outlet to some patch of a town garden-ground, Chrystal climbed the stair again, straying into the living-room where she had eaten the morning cakes and porridge set out, she had guessed, for her.

Strong little fingers wrestled to conquer with the time-stiffened window-hasplings, then the moorland-bred girl leaned out over the sill for a free breath. A stealthy cat in the court below was all she saw for some moments, then the cat was dispossessed. A tall man with a seeking air had entered from the dark passage-way, his upraised eyes met full those of the girl at the window above.

She recognised, and with the instinct of hospitality that was law at Clear Havens, was at the house-door to greet the stranger who had ridden with her through a night. The gentleman refused her gesture to enter, lowering his tones to assort with the gloomy aspect of things around.

"I would have speech with Major Weir!" he said. "Is he within?"

"No' the now!" Chrystal unconsciously pouted at the unseeingness of the glance that fell upon her, but the stern sadness of the chestnut-brown eyes spoke to her girlish sympathies. "Will you not come in and rest you while you wait on him?"

"I set no foot over a Covenanter's threshold after yesterday!" her invitation was rebuffed. Yet the man hesitated, looking at the face where his abruptness had fetched up the red of the anemones. "I saw you there!" he added, an accusation in his voice.

"Not with my goodwill!"

The grey and the tawny eyes sought each other, and met.

"You will tell me then!" The stranger's voice, lower than ever, had an appeal in it, his right hand moved towards Chrystal's as though summoning a comrade. "Tell me the words he spoke at the last!"

"I treasured them for you!" A truth which the girl had not owned even to herself rushed unbidden from her lips. "Said he, on their fleecing to pray wi' him, 'No, truly, that a servant of King Charles could not crave such'—and he made a brief scornful pause—'*honours* among his enemies!'"

The eyes into which she was looking leapt into sudden flame, the bridle-hard hand came strongly upon hers.

"*Honours among his enemies!* On your life, lass, were those his very words?"

"Sure's death!" Chrystal's eyes were black with eagerness. "Sir, I promised myself to keep them for you, and I promised too, if luck gave the chance, to tell you that the Marquess marked you at the last, saw how you would dare all to die wi' him!"

A hard yellow light in the tawny eyes replaced the softness in them. Chrystal turned with a start, to find Major Weir's dark presence beside her.

"What means this forwardness, girl?" he demanded, his look falling on the hand that the stranger still held clasped. "Get you to your chamber!"

"It is my wyte, if any, sir, who asked your daughter!"—

"Eh, man, not his daughter! I'm Chrystal Hope!"

temptuously "The key you prate of is of a door in my house, the whilk is ever locked upon the plenish of my father's chalmer as it was in Kirkton" He bent a rebuking frown on the face raised to his "If you continue to conduct yourself as the forward woman you have given sign of being to-day, Chrystal Hope, I warn you that you may look for no long abiding in my house, but may take your chance among the wildies your cousins for all me!"

Stunned by the rebuke, that sounded the more crushing for the low measured tones of the voice, Chrystal stood gazing at the door through which the man passed out with the finish of his sentence. Tears of resentment of his harsh injustice sprang to her eyes as she turned forlorn to her quarters,—to stop midway in the passage with a sudden thought.

The door to which he had pointed in his angry speech was that of the chamber where she had spent the night, the key which Grizel had taken from her girdle fitted in its lock.

Major Weir, frowning heavily over the ill-convenient eyes and ears and tongue lodged for the present in his house, had no guess that the habit instinctive in him of taking a crooked road in preference over the straight had for once played him false. Abroad since the previous evening, he could not guess that Grizel had surrendered what was to her a jealously-wardened shrine. Rushed by circumstance to a lie direct, he was inclined to hold himself debtor to circumstance for providing him with so likely a one, his regret and resentment were for the whey-faced chit who had made needful so much of a departure from his usual strong position of assumed inactivity.

With her discovery, Chrystal had made a resolution. Flinging her camlet riding-cloak about her, she sprang back to the house-door, freeing the court and passage-way with no more delay than a fugitive look about her required. The hasty glance reassured her as to the only ideas clear in her thought, Major Weir's dangerous presence was vanished, and in the narrowing of the steep street the grey eyes spied

Adam Gordon, directing himself upon the Grass-market

Fearlessly, as though the bends of the Bow had been the lonely Lammermuirs, Chrystal ran fleetly after him. The jangle from the wolk-booths of the whitesmiths and tinklarians that lined the West Bow went unheeded by her, though many a hammerman looked up from the dagger tempering to deadly sharpness, or the whitening of his pewter-ware, to speed a glance after the pretty lass hastening so fast. Chrystal had never a look for the moon and stars in gilt on the French watchmaker's house beyond the Bow Port, her eyes were fixed on the tall man striking west across the Grassmarket, his springy step baffling her speed.

Orchard trees, with a hoar-frost of scanty blossom on them, stood in forlorn twos and threes in the parts where the pair had set face to, for the town was thinning out behind them. A penurious country maintained itself where once king's men had ridden in their tilting over a gallant green, and dainty dames had honoured the Barras tournaments with the braveries of silks and taffetas to which the wind blowing out of the Fife hills in the blue distance would bring no soil. But Chrystal's haste did not so much as let her savour the hint of salt in the air setting in from the Firth. The man she followed had bent into an opening among houses, she was fast on his heels, when the heart in the girlish body seemed grasped in a strong hand, leaving her sick and faint with a stound of terror.

Out of the narrowness of the Portsburgh almost abreast with her, a wisp of horsemen came riding, laughing and joking as they came. At the ring of hoofs the girl had glanced aside, the bound of the hare that sees the hounds upon her form was in her next movement. For the man who rode first, leaning aside in his saddle to crack a jest with the old moustache behind, was reckless Esmé Hope.

He had seen her! Chrystal knew it by the gay French oath ringing out, but as he wrenched round

his horse's head, the beast gave her a golden moment by shying violently at a long-backed swine that daundered forth from its quarters under the fore-stair of a house Chrystal doubled breathless into the close opening at hand, where Adam Gordon, guessing little of his terrified pursuer, was in the act of mounting a stone stair leading to the second floor of a dwelling

With ears strained for hoof-beats, the girl flew towards him, striving to place herself near the arm that she knew was strong Fear and breathlessness barred the steps to her, she swerved aside to dart through a door set in their lee, giving entrance to the ground-floor of the building

In the act Chrystal stopped short From a table strewn with jeweller's tools a man rose slowly, out of a large chair, fixing vivid black eyes on the abrupt visitor Something outlandish in his dress, the olive of his skin and the blackness of hair and eyes, marked the foreigner, but the girl, stopping dead short on the threshold, saw something more

From the folds of the cloak cast about the man's shoulders, a man's face, precisely similar to his own, rose beside him, the black eyes turning with the same curiosity to Chrystal A smile kindled in them, as the girl remained, gasping and horrified, in the doorway

"Lazare, thou great Goth, tell this charming signorina, who has apparently fallen from heaven like Madonna of Ephesus, that we are a very harmless couple!" the extraordinary apparition commanded, in the careful English of a foreigner The man addressed advanced a step or two, his bow replicaed by the head and shoulders visible within the cloak-drapery

"It is true, signorina I am the excellency's very humble servant, Lazare Coloredon Génois, by trade and birth mortmaker and Italian"

"And Gian Battista, pumpkinhead, Gian Battista, who has all the brains to make up for thy having all the arms and legs," interrupted the head

vivaciously "We are twins, signorina, more closely attached than is common with brothers, 'tis God's truth ' "

"I desire to speak with the gentleman who entered before me," Chrystal faltered, leaning back on the door to support herself in her tremblings "In truth, I crave pardon for rushing thus in upon you, but I am pursued—in danger ' "

The strange brothers exchanged glances

CHAPTER VII

IN THE "LAND" OF THE BARRAS

"It brings back the old days in Rome when the Colonna and Orsini made the Corso the valley of death to each other," commented Gian Battista with a thin laugh "Lazare, stir those lazy legs of thine, let us into the street and tell the pretty lady what's there for the seeing!"

"Better make your bargain wi' me than wi' the man wi'out, for all his gay gallant ways and his cock-horse," Chrystal interrupted eagerly "His purse has the wasting sickness on it, poor thing!"

"Which is why he would match it with a well-fed one, to raise a healthy stock!" completed the demiman coolly "Be not afraid, Donna Fair-face, if Lazare is to fetch the gentleman who came to lodge in the 'land' above yesterday, we must into the street, for there is no road from this floor to the next but by the stair without, as the priests tell us Holy Mother Church bridges the gulf between this world and Paradise"—

His brother made a quick gesture and step forward, leaving Chrystal alone with her bewildered thoughts. In spite of her light tone she was trembling from head to heel, as she sank into the chair pushed from the table, trying to explain to herself her wildest wooer's unlooked-for appearance in Edinburgh. Like a little bird that sees the hawk stoop over her, Chrystal shuddered and nested farther back into the chair, a repentance of her rash dash into the streets tinged by an odd secret satisfaction in knowing herself within reach of the man with the strong hand and tawny, unsmiling eyes.

White as a snowdrop, she lay with closed lids in a temporary lull, shaken from her soon enough by the slow heavy tread of her returning messenger. The curled lashes rose unwillingly for the amazingly repulsive sight awaiting them, but they flickered fully upwards at glimpse of Adam Gordon.

"Here is no place for you, child!"

At the brusque rebuke of tone the girl-mouth drooped like the chidden child he had named her. The Italians standing within the door advanced a foot or so.

"*Cio' madonna*, if your presence is displeasing to the cavaliere, there's one without to whom it won't be so!" interrupted Gian Battista. "Half a score of his men are corking this wolf's mouth of an alley close as a vineleaf stoppers a flask of Chianti, and he himself with a friend or two is visiting from house to house with the nose of the Holy Office for a heretic or a ferret for a rat!"

With a little terrified cry Chiystal stretched out her hands to Gordon—

"Save me!" she panted. "Save me from Esme Hope!"

The man she had chosen for champion did not soften a whit in his unsmiling gaze, but he took the small entreating hands in a strong and steady clasp.

"She must not be found here!" He looked at the two brothers with a swift glance.

"Behind the faggots?" Lazare Génois pointed to the stack of heather, heaped high in its billets behind the door. "We could build them up in front!"—

"And we could pray the *signori* of their goodness not to rake them down with their swords!" Gian Battista interpolated scornfully. His black eyes questioned the box-bed, the whole scanty furniture, with increasing dissatisfaction. "If madonna will indeed hide where she will not be found, there's nothing for it but the well!"

"The well!" echoed the other. "She will drown!"

"Dost know as much by losing thy wits in it?" snarled the demi-man "Madonna knows best if she would rather wet those dainty feet of hers than lie warm and dry with a handsome bedfellow to-night!"

"Man, man, where is this well?" Chrystal's cry was passionate

"Canst not spare me a hand to point to it, Lazare?" demanded the uncanny twin sarcastically "Here, messer, cast this cloak of Lazare's about your shoulders and lift madonna within it, the neighbours—if any are in the way—are used to see us drawing water I regret that we cannot marshal you,—out through that door, signore, and quick,—for I must stay to put any who come off the scent, and Lazare, as you may guess, has no mind to leave me!"

Without a word Gordon flung the cloak about him, happing Chrystal in it as he lifted her from the ground. The shiver which ran through the slender, slight body owed nothing to her danger, the girl shut her eyes and pressed her face against the broad shoulder simply to shut out the weird sight of the brothers with the masking drapery shed from them, the standing man weighted forward by the abortive creature that sprang from his waist, unfinished from the trunk downwards

"Have no fear At the worst I will kill him who comes, before he win within breath of you"

Gordon said it quietly, stepping with his burden out into the patch of waste ground that set a ragged edge on the west to the Barras

"Eh, no, no, I would not have Esmé killed! Poor Esmé, I liked him well enough before he took to the courting of my money-bags!"

They had reached the open well surmounted by its windlass, and Gordon stooped without speaking to cast in a morsel of stone broken from its edge of masonry He raised himself with a satisfied nod

"Truly the water's low enough to do no more than wet you waist-deep, should the bucket run down into it," he said rapidly "In with you, in God's name!"

A knocking of a thunderous rattling rose up in the rear on his woids, winging movement Taking her garments about her, the gill took place in the bucket, which a few turns of the windlass had brought into reach, watching thereafter with a horrible feeling of sinking the patch of sky above rising as the eimer swayed and fell again into the pitch middle distance of her hidie-hole

Halfway down it stopped, the rope reefed on the windlass by the strong hand above Chrystal, winging dizzily, adventured an exploring touch on the stonework circling her, but withdrew it quickly Clammy, stinking, slimy, Joseph's pit could scarcely have been a loathlier hold than an Embro' well in the seventeenth century

Voices and trampling were loud as the man at the windlass finished his task He cast a glance around composedly, then, moving a few steps from the well, stretched himself at length on the footworn grass, in the pale sunshine that gave pretext to leisure to bask in it

As he had expected, the searchers swaggered out upon the common, the young leader scanning the open ground

"Hallo, Master Lazybones, was the wench last night so witty that she kept you awake with her talk? Shall I lend you the toe of my boot to help you to your feet?"

"Best not, sir, lest I should apay the loan with the heel of my sword," Adam, raised on an elbow, retorted For a silence the blue eyes shot stormy defiance into the chestnut ones, then Esmé, with an oath, turned away

"What's here? A well! Curse me! the water will be of a different smack to the streams of the Lammermuirs," he cried, idly slashing with the sword, drawn on possible foes, in his hand at the rope coiled about the beam Adam Gordon rose lightly to his feet, his Toledo growing by inches out of his scabbard Would the rope, severed strands curling up here and there, bear the weight of the fugitive down in

the darkness? Would the girl be game enough not to betray herself by a cry?

For the space that Gordon's fingers twitched at his basket-hilt, Death made an unseen third with the men at the well-edge. Esmé Hope had no guess that the quick impatient swing with which he turned on his heel had saved his life for him.

"We've drawn a blank covert!" he cried, blowing on his fingers in imitation of a huntsman's horn. "Rot me! if we can cheat our insides longer of their dinners. Love, folks say, heats in waiting, but collops will not!"

His voice, loud in chanderings with his followers, had scarcely died away from the patch of waste, before Adam had gained the house. Launching himself through the Génois' dwelling, he cleared the outer stair almost at a bound, to return in an instant from his own lodging with a coil of stout rope. A glance of his hawk-eyes assured him that the searchers had drawn off, probably to console themselves for their blank chase by meats and drinks to the length of their purses at *Greppa* or the *White Horse*.

Throwing an imperious beckon over his shoulder as he brushed past the Italians, the man had not lost a moment when he stood again by the well-curb. One end of the tow lashed about the windlass, he knotted the other strongly under his arms, and with a brief direction to Lazare lowered himself into the blackness.

"The worst's by, but I dare not trust the rope to draw you up with!"

Guiding himself deftly with his stockinged feet, he cleared the bucket, stretching his arms for the light figure visible in the darkness.

With the child's faith, Chrystal surrendered herself to his purpose, holding to his shoulder as Lazare, above, worked the windlass with might and main. The arms that girdled the girl's waist gripped like a bar of steel.

"A brave soldier was spoilt in you!"

The windlass had responded gallantly to the unusual strain. Gordon, flushed under his tan, was steadying his charge on her two dainty feet. Chrystal did not unclench the little hands, shudder after shudder ran over her as she looked into the black hole below them.

"To chop words, I could not keep you dangling there like a roasting fowl on the jack, but 'twas overly dangerous!"

"No danger to one who has often enough hung over the Bass and Fasnet Rocks, blinded by the spindrift, and with hands full of the striving eaglet I had made prize of."

Gordon's tone was of the briefest, the gulf, letting her upraised hands fall, felt the east wind blight of his indifference upon her young gratitude and romance. A flush mounted to the edges of the disordered gold hair, as with down-dropped eyes she stood on the battered grasses.

"I have not as yet explained my errand to-day, sir." The tone had in it something defensive, excusing.

The tawny eyes came upon her face. Chrystal knew it through the down-dropped eyelids.

"You spoke to Major Weir of a key?"

"A key, twisted in the handle into O and B!" The man's voice was eager, imperative. "Child—if you know aught of it—'tis of an importance you cannot guess!"

"He lied to you!" A certainty which Major Weir's dominating personality had forbidden Chrystal to formulate, started awake in her soul. "*He has the key!*"

Adam's hand adjoined by its grasp.

"How know you it?"

"I have seen it—no later than the day I met you first!"

The tawny eyes were no longer on her face. With the heel of his scabbard Gordon was drawing on the dusty ground at their feet a key with a twisted handle wrought into the letters O and B.

"Was it like that? Look at it as you would look for Heaven—look well before you answer!"

"Its very marrow!"

The man started from her side in uncontrollable excitement

"I knew it!" he muttered between his teeth "The Marquess passed on his trust to me yesterday, when he gave the signal Ogilvie told me had been concerted on in case of the worst. How to get it from his enemies? Is my word—is *his* last thought to be wrecked on a Covenanter's lie?"

He faced Chrystal

"Child!" the tawny eyes were blazing, "if there was truth in the tears you wept for him who died the martyr's death yesterday, you will do what lies in you to fulfil his last wish. Procure me yon key!"

Chrystal started back

"Cross Major Weir! Oh, I dare not, dare not!"

Gordon sent a jarring laugh over the quiet ground

"The tears! Women and crocodiles are some sib!"

"You are harsh, unkind!" A flame of resentment troubled the girl's whiteness, the grey eyes glanced through a mist "'Tis like a man to cry out on the whole clutch because he has chanced maybe to find one rotten egg in it! Women are not the ill things you say!"

Gordon gave back a step, looking at the pretty creature before him, trembling with the helpless passion of the child against injustice. A sudden smile broke the sternness of his handsome face, by its gleam Chrystal saw the man was far younger than she had hitherto taken him to be.

"A bargain!" He held out his hand as to a comrade. "The paladins of old proved their doughtiness by some deed of derring-do, so much you have read in your girl's romaunts. To get hold of yon key, there's your task to prove you,—and no heavy one, women are born to fool men as cats are made to catch mice!"

A faint surprise crept into his face at the ignoring

of his offered hand, the handsome Cavalier did not seem used to find his favours sown on rock. The flush lingered on Chrystal's cheeks, her look had dropped from his.

"I will do it!" She flung out the words with a pouting defiance. "I cannot fool men, if Major Weir questions me thereafter I will tell truth, but I will take my chance of stealing his ill-begot key!"

She had spoken with a defiant resolve to do this thing for that man, to compel an admiration that she might flout it, but as his eyes, brilliant with satisfaction, came quickly to her, she recognised with a prick of pain that the instrument for his purpose was something to him, Chrystal Hope nothing.

"You shall run no danger!" Gordon spoke thoughtfully, looking at the drawing on the earth. "Major Weir is like to know the wards of the key as little as myself, did he find a dummy in the place of the real one he would think nothing less than that it had been changed at nurse!"

Chrystal's invincible sunniness had conquered her pouting, with sweet ardour she stood ready to make his cause her own. "Why think you that Major Weir denied the key to you?"

"Good faith! I know not, unless he guessed it unlocked some secret of which he was ignorant, and so held fast lest he should lose more than he knew."

"So might he take counsel thereanent with someone of the Parliament, such as my Lord Aigyle?"

"Argyle! Doth he come to speech with him?"

"I saw him in talk wi' a glaed-eyed gentleman whom I heard thereafter named of that ilk."

"The communion of saints—devils rather!"

"Sir, you are harsh! I marked my Lord Aigyle when Major Weir rehearsed him the deed of yesterday. Crede me, he wept!"

"So do my crocodiles!" came the bitter answer.

"Your kennin' of them—as of women—is but hearsay!"

The quick defiance of the answer brought Gordon's pleasant flashing smile again. He blurred with his

boot the sand over the drawing, glancing at the curly head scarcely above his elbow

"You stand pledged to make me change my tune," he said good-humouredly "Hear my device A key such as I limned there will be no tough job for a hammerman to fashion, to-night, when the moon is wearing away, I will make shift to throw it into your chamber, 'twill be the signal to you to cast the true one out to me"

"To-night!" The words were on Chrystal's tongue, but she bit them back This man should learn that a woman could be as true comrade as a man

"I will leave my casement standing ajar, 'tis the token you shall know it by"

They had reached the house once more, Chrystal lingering on the threshold in a repulsion of the curiosity darting at them from Gian Battista's black eyes His brother, busy with a mess of macaroni cooking over the fire, scarcely looked up as the girl advanced towards them

"'Twill be none the worse for you that you have served me in a strait," she began "I will send you the reward you've earned by this gentleman"

"Golden words, madonna," observed Gian Battista "Lazare, my friend, hast not a scrape for Madonna Fair-face, canst not tell her that thy fingers are cleverer than thy great stupid head, in mortmaking, fashioning rings with posies such as a *cavalhere servente* may bestow on a pretty damigella, graving locks for the cabinet where the pretty damigella may store her love-letters A bee plunging into the heart of a rosebud, signorina, is a dainty conceit for such a lock Lazare devised it but lately for a bridegroom's gift to the Cavaliere Moray his fair daughter"

The calculation with which an angler drops a hidden hook over the spot where he divines a prey, was in the black eyes of the demi-man

Chrystal breathed more freely when she left the weird brothers behind, striking out with her companion for the Grassmarket

"That deil's bantling is like an ill goblin ' Do not trust him ' " she whispered

"I trust no man, but use those I need," Gordon responded with his usual cynical indifference "That yon Italian can fashion me the dummy key to play your grim Covenanter the trick is a handsel from Luck's hand, no hammerman of them all in the Bow is like to have so safe a gossip as he in that half-hatched brother of his "

Chrystal assayed no more remonstrance The Grassmarket was a-jostle, not with the compact crowd of yesterday, but with the chafferings of the horse and cattle market which the hanging had ousted through a daylight The heavy lowing of the kye, the clash of iron hoofs on stone, the shouts of men who had maybe wetted thumbs once too often in the bargains clinched that day at the Lady's Steps above, added to the confusion of the girl's brain, the black castle, hanging like a threat over her path, oppressed her spirits like an omen The pair had toiled half-way up the Bow before either spoke

"To-night—at the wearing away of the moon ' You will not fail? "

Gordon paused with his question beside a quaint wood-fronted house, to look steadily at the girl, slim and fair as a lily-stem, at his side Chrystal caught the look, her feminine instinct guessed shrewdly that the anxiety in it solely concerned the tempering of an instrument

' There is no false blood in me," she said shortly, hastening forward as she spoke Resentment carried her beyond the weakness of a passing glance, yet as she dived into the Weir passage she knew the street behind her for empty, and felt inconsequently disappointed thereat

Pushing the house-door behind open with hardly more noise than a marauding mouse, Chrystal started guiltily Major Weir, an odd effect of obeying a summons upon him, faced her full

"Who was he you parted with below by the Mahogany Lands? " he demanded without preface

"Sir, but for him ye might be singing—

'John, John, John,
The grey goose is gone!'"

cried the girl promptly "Esmé Hope had me nabbit if he had not countered him!"

She noted with relief that the secret man's knowledge evidently did not extend over her and her adventures, a frown darkening his face at the news

"How came you to be gawpsying in the street?" he asked sternly "Get you to Grizel, in my house there is no place for idle women?"

Glad to escape from him, the girl mounted the stair as he pointed towards the long chamber of the living-room This time no preparations for a meal appeared in its swept and garnished order, Grizel, spinning on one side of the chalk-line of boundary, beckoned as she entered

"*His staff told him!*" she whispered, the unaccountable words sending a chill through Chrystal's blood

"Told him what?"

Grizel rose, stretching her arms as one weary of labour

"The prayer-assembly aye takes a weary spinning!" she said "There's the vam-glory, and the wandering thoughts, and the Pharisee vaunting self over self's brother, and the snug, silent purpose that brings each o' them a' together!"

She had divided the heap of yarn in two unequal parts, lifting the smaller pile as she spoke A burst of her harsh laughter made Chrystal shrink

"And the large half," she cried, "is brother Thomas' prayers!"

Footsteps on the stairs came a deliverance to the feeling of awe stealing over her hearer Stout matrons, ruffs and kerchiefs starched to display their quality of lawn and principles, pursy burgesses, other men, who walked as if used to the kick of a cut-and-thrust at their flank, a preponderance of the single sisterhood, whose arid, denied lives demand

some object of interest—a favourite minister—or a cat the assembly gathered themselves together in the twilight space, and with faces turned doorwards, waited.

Their leader did not delay them long. Chrystal, at the door-cheek, saw that others beside herself knew the slow heavy tread, a surprise making itself felt in her at the decorous satisfaction overspreading the visages, but the surprise was destined to deepen. Major Weir of the West Bow was of a character cut in various facets, the soldier scrupulous in duty, the fanatical Covenanter, the stern master of the house, were to-night in shadow, the side uppermost revealed him simple, kindly, fervent, of a subtle sympathy alluring alike to impressible women as to world-hardened men.

The exchange of friendliness was over, and the standing ranks had closed their eyes. Yet Major Weir, erect in the centre of the room, paused unwontedly, his lips once or twice moving, but dumbly. So long was the pause that closed eyes opened. Chrystal had opportunity to observe a knot of faces apparently untouched by the prevailing atmosphere of enthusiasm, the few who composed it centred about a man proclaimed minister by his dress, the marked attention lent by him to each word or look of Major Weir suggesting rather a cat's attitude at a mousehole than a dog's alert absorption in a master. The comparison had just occurred to Chrystal when the pause was broken by the master of the house passing out with brief excuse through the worshippers. The girl watched him descend the stairs to the landing, then a little shiver ran through her excited mood. Major Weir had kept the meeting waiting merely to fetch his staff from where it had leant forgotten in a corner, with it in his hand he was making way to his place again.

During the moment of his absence the congregation had bubbled into speech, the group which Chrystal had noticed apparently urging something on its centre figure, who seemed to yield a reluctant consent at last. As Major Weir retook his former

position, one of the whisperers edged himself to the front

"Thomas Weir, my good friend, the Bow is well used to your prayers, but souls fed though they may be on heavenly manna, are yet apt to loathe it, over-long persisted in!" he declaimed Angelical Thomas sent one of his looks flickering over the faces—he had read the discontent of knitted brows and compressed lips in the group of malcontents before he made ready gracefully for the criticism recognised by him as inevitable

"Truly, friend, I am glad to have those who deal faithfully with me! Tell me and spare not, what displeases you in my poor halting words?"

The simple humility appealed to more than the adoring female bodyguard, darting indignant whispers and glances to match at the assailant. The latter's response was many degrees friendlier for it

"Hoots, man, as little as in manna, but the flesh is weak, ye ken, and a change of diet profiteth by times"—he hesitated "And as the minister of Ormiston finds himself among us, there were two-three of the folk who were minded it would edify the Church did he lead the exercise to-night"

"Troth, let yon two-three o' that ilk hearken to him then, for the lave o's have come together to hear Angelical Thomas, and no the minister of Ormiston nor another!" The women would no longer be denied. Major Weir appealed with uplifted hand against the tumult, but it would not be quelled, even when he moved through the shrill protestants, to range himself visibly on his rival's side

"Friends, deny me not, but listen to this my young brother as to me!" he entreated, but in vain. The frank good-fellowship merely heightened enthusiasm for himself, emphasised as it was by the ill-grace of the Ormiston man, obviously resenting a generosity which, a morbid jealousy was quick to feel, put himself in the worst light

"Eh, Major Weir, pray! Pray, Thomas Weir, if no more than a sentence!" was cried to him on all

sides, as thereafter similar words, but with an accent of pity, not reverence, would be cried to him on a morning fresh with a wind off the Forth

Major Weir may have grown tired of the scene at last, he spoke with an accent of command that laid the storm incontinently enough to provoke in any unsympathetic witness a passing wonder that it had not been resorted to before

"I bid ye listen to the message that this godly youth has for us! Doth it not stand fast that out of the mouth of babes and sucklings shall be given forth wisdom?" he ordained

The minister, of Ormiston held the floor, but his words, even to himself, were slavish and ill-chosen. Major Weir dominated the yet seething assembly with his glance, the speaker resented it as he felt it heavy on himself, spying out, it seemed to his restless self-consciousness, the secret vain-glory and envy which, self inexorably made plain, had prompted the wish to shine in the Edinburgh assembly. The knowledge might have generated repentance at another time, now it but worked for smouldering resentment and a vicious determination to one day show himself the superior of the man who had pricked him in the quick of his youth, had made him an effective background to throw into relief the Christian graces of Angelical Thomas

Nor, when it came to Major Weir's turn to lead, was the Ormiston minister's mood bettered. Weir's subject that night was the deadly snare of vanity and jealousy, he besought for grace to own another's greater gifts, to be withheld from scheming to belittle a neighbour to uplift oneself. More than once the fluent fervour faltered, as the man praying drew a portrait of himself in which, the sighs and tears around him attested, others were quick rather to see a portrait of the man beside him, who stood and heard all unflinchingly, save that he slowly and regularly struck the fist of one hand into the palm of the other, with the gesture in which one might hammer a nail into a coffin a-making

Chrystal welcomed the finish of the assembly with a throb of the impatience to which the length of the proceedings had dragged leaden. Watching the moon flung like a quoit on the night without, the longing gnawed in her to be at the task for which the man with the unsmiling eyes held her promise for a pawn. The Ormiston party, their sullen minister in the midst, were the first to go, but Major Weir's adherents were ardent to-night, slowly and slowly the people went. Half ashamed at the necessity for stealth, the girl grasped the first opportunity of slipping unperceived to the chamber where the casement was set ajeer.

The Lady's Bell had long rung out, and Chrystal kept vigil. The moon like a ghost haunting a dead past had swept in a sorrowful way over the bleached earth, half her time of grace before the dawn, when ghosts must flee, was told. Chrystal had not heard a footstep on the flags, when true and swift as bullet to billet, something whizzed through the window, a clink on the boards where she crouched fell in clamour on her brain. From where she sat, the girl put out a hand, the fingers closing on cold metal. In the blanching light it showed a black bar across her curving palm, but Chrystal, gazing on the forged key, saw it rather as an inexorably beckoning finger, for it gave her the signal to redeem her word.

Slowly she rose to her feet, the beats of her heart thudding in her ears. Her hand on the latch, she was about to steal forth, as a thief must steal to rob a sleeping man, when a sudden riotous knocking vibrated through the house, and the voice of her cousin Esmé Hope called vociferously upon Major Weir.

CHAPTER VIII

COMRADE CHRYSAL

"Ho, worthy Watch-and-Pray, come forth! Open the door to a pretty penitent, with the night for a prudent gossip! Bring yourself back from the third heaven into which you've slipped by mistake, and open, Master Pray-without-Ceasing, if you would not have me wake the neighbours to listen to the merry tale you told before the claret flooded you in our last frolic!"

Chrystal, listening to the ribald gay summons, with its frank inventions, suddenly shrank back. Across the passage leading to her room, a light had glimmered and gone, a draught of cold air told that the street-door had turned upon its hinges.

"Ha, old fox, I've run you to earth at last!" Esme's loud careless tones rang across her listening. "Faith, I would not have been thus late for supper if my legs had not played the mutineers with me, till I laid them up a matter of an hour or so to teach them who was captain! My head, too, buzzed above a bit, the randy at the tavern has some liquors that the new-fangled, lang-nebbit gaugers never said grace over!"

"This is no place or hour for drunkards!" Major Weir's measured voice answered. "I keep no tavern!"

"No, old friend, your black face would soon spoil custom if you did!" Esmé retorted. "But you keep something else, the pretty petticoat Chrystal and the table of stone concerning her!"

The other appeared to take the word something hurriedly.

"If you have aught to say worth the hearing,

better the inside of four walls than the house-top," he remarked, Chrystal could hear the door opening in its reluctant hospitality

The heart in her bosom struggled like a wild thing in her agony of listening to the heavy footsteps Up the stair they went, the rushlight which Major Weir carried waking fittish wills-o'-the-wisp of reflections in the dark panellings

Noiseless like ghost or fairy, a little figure stole out from the side-passage into the hall from which the stairs ran up A door, etched grey upon blackness, stood open before her in the dark

The light, dimly pervading its space, came from the slowly-winking coals of a brazen crucible standing near a table strewn with papers Strange lines and angles on some tickled curiosity in the girl, stealing, mothwise, by inches nearer the light, she bent closer, to recoil at sight of a human hand, severed at the wrist In a wild break she had flown out to the door, when the thought of her word came to scourge her back to her task Resolutely she turned, searching the dimness with straining eyes, drawing close her garments, lest a stool, brushed from place, might tell a tale of the girl who came to steal

A huge pile of boots and shoes heaped against the farther wall drew her glance, some with grey mildew bloom upon them, others as though but just kicked from the foot Chrystal noticed vaguely, little shoes and heavy boots, high-heeled slippers that in their time must have pattered it daintily, and ankle-ties tramped out of shape on wearer's errands, pattens like those affected by the milkmaids sending their morning reveillé "*Curds and Whey!*" through the streets, and velvet boots that by their shapelessness had nursed gouty toes A weird fancy of the frozen footprints of some strange *danse macabre* came to the girl gazing at the relics of feet,—some of them in all likelihood now beneath the mools,—dance of Life rather, where feet strike in seeming haphazard across carefully planned windings, where the figure sweeps on heedless of here and there a dancer vanished, breaking

now into mad hurry and again into monotonous weavings, where dancers young and ardent press ceaselessly upon those whom the pace has staled, and the dark Partner Death clasps hands with all in turn, his caprice part of the harmony. It was with an effort that she averted her glance, to take up the quest once more.

Where the shadows fought with and foiled the light the great fourpost bed showed grimly, the outlines of its posts and naked canopy rising two-thirds of the room's height, with an effect of some stark, waiting gibbet. On the coveilet articles of wearing apparel lay scattered as the wearer had cast them, coat, bands, flapped waistcoat.

Chrystal tied the pockets. Once and again she drew blank, then—she thrilled through bone and marrow as she had it—the key, the key, the key!

With the flight of the lapwing back to her chamber, where the blanching moonshine had faded from casement and floor. Confidently at first, then anxiously, she leant from her window, twisting her pretty neck this way and that to see somewhere in the gloom of the courtyard the tall figure waiting till his comrade should have fulfilled devoir. The moon was wearing away.

"Adam!" Chrystal blushed and smiled as she sent the whispered name, safer than well-known Gordon, through the darkness to seek him. Like Noah's dove, the soft-winged messenger came back to her empty.

She stood upright at last, guessing at the truth. Before the step and voice roistering through the courtyard, Gordon had deemed it prudent to withdraw, possibly to return on the unexpected visitor's departure.

Stunned in the whirlpool of sensation in which she had beaten up and down since her launch from peaceful Clear Havens, Esmé's unlooked-for appearance caused her more alarm by the length of his visit than by the visit itself. Chrystal even had a mischievous smile for her wild-brained kinsman's

disappointment if he had ever reckoned on gaining an ally in Major Weir by releasing him from the camp. With the fervour manifested by her guardian that night at the exercises in mind, it seemed likely enough that the Covenanter was improving the occasion by admonishing the reckless good-for-nothing upon the error of his ways, sheer girlish laughter bubbled up in her throat as she pictured Esmé's discomfiture.

The conference at last broke up, Esmé's boots and voice were loud on the stairway. Chrystal, in her startled watch at her doorway, recognised, with a surprise, that he went many degrees tipsier than he came.

"Split me, if he be not in need of a coffin before cockcrow!" he exclaimed, as he lurched downwards. "You're the right sort to have given me the office, brother, and your tippie is the right sort too, burn me if 'tis not! That face o' yours is a cursed liar, man alive! To look at it none would take you for pleasanter company than the hangman! Buss me, I say! 'twill keep your hand in for the wenches! So, now to send the fine fellow you tell me of to kiss Death, that he may not kiss little Chrystal, pretty Chrystal Hope!"

The house-door shut abruptly in the middle of the speaker's drunken quave, as, prolonging the name, he faded out of hearing, to shape an erratic course for the Grassmarket. The wind from the Nor' Loch blew the wine fumes from his well-seasoned head, he was as sober a man as he ever was when he stopped short, throwing up his head as a hound snuffs the wind. On the wind the clash of crossing steels came sharp and clear, wooing the Borderer with its tale of fighting men. Esmé broke into the Grassmarket at a run, to make for the group which he perceived at the mouth of the Horse Wynd, trails of sparks flying from their briskly countering swords.

As he drew nearer, he could see that the heart of the tulzie was around one man standing alone, his back set to the wall. A rise in the ground was the sole advantage to him over his assailants, but

his fence was as cool as though the points hedging him in and about had been buttoned into harmlessness. He had just parried masterly a vicious plunging thrust, when Esme leapt forward, maiming with the sweep of his broadsword a treacherous back blow sinking in under guard.

"*Peste*, sirs! you're over-matched!" he shouted, thrusting right and left. "Two men against a pack of curs, 'twill be no shame to you breaking ground against such odds!"

The flail action of the great sword cleared him a way to the wall, side by side the two men faced the fight that leapt up again like flame. The Hope laughed aloud in his slashing assault, but the stranger spoke suddenly and sharply, his look not for a second wavering from the bristling points.

"Take tent, lest they nail you to yon shutter in your back!"

With the leap of a wildcat Esmé honoured the warning, a sword flickering past in the instant of his spring, to strike up to its middle into the wood. In the same moment the swordsman beside him had disengaged and lunged, a quick breaking ground of the assailants alone cheated the churchyard.

"S—s—s—, my beauties!" shouted Esmé, twisting a handkerchief round the fingers chafed by his open sword-hilt. "A skinful of good wine and a fight to wind up with! By h—l, the luck's mine to-night!"

'The rats! The rats!'

The call, echoing shrilly from watching heads at the windows, finished the discomfiture of the rufflers. Like a drift of dust they broke in all directions, before the men, strangers to Edinburgh, had grasped the situation, inaugurated by a squad of the rusty-ied uniforms of the Town Guard descending on the battle from the steep slope of the Greyfriars Yard.

"Never be downhadden, gossips!" shouted Esmé, reeling towards them in spite of his ally's detaining clutch at his arm. "Ye come late for the tulzie, but the Solemn League and Covenant has not yet

dinged all original sin out of bonnie Scotland, there'll be plenty more! So let's drink to one another's better acquaintance in the handiest tavern, he who keeps head longest above mahogany to pay the lawing!"

"The tavern of the Black Hole must serve this night!" retorted the lieutenant, who had signed to his men to close up. With a rapid flank movement the retreat had been cut off, the two once more found themselves overmatched by a full score, this time handicapped with no wine-flustered heads. "Ye can rendezvous yonder to heart's content wi' your ilk," the officer went on sardonically. "Ye'll no' find more cards and curses, women and wine, in hell's self!"

"Business before pleasure, friend!" Esmé remonstrated. "I am under a vow to cut a man's throat for him before cockcrow, and for a stoup of claret and the company of Nell Cuddle'em you would have Esmé Hope break word!"

"Better broken word than broken neck on the gallows!" growled the lieutenant, with his men hustling their prey into motion. As the procession wound up towards the dorsal ridge of the High Street, the light from a bowat shone in coarse illumination on the face of the stranger walking at Esmé's side. The Hope vented an oath.

"The man o' the Barras! Burst me, if you're not the same for whom I've been scouring the Grass-market to-night!"

The other looked keenly at him.

"I know not what should have procured me the honour, sir. As you say, we met in the Barras to-day, for the rest I know no more of you than your name, and that you risked yourself in my quarrel to-night."

"Ay, yon sneaking blade would have hamstrung you to a certainty had I not nicked it!"

Esmé spoke absently, but his thoughts were interrupted by the halt of the Guard before the long black Guardhouse, obstructing the High Street as a tree-trunk snags in mid-river channel. Behind the low

roof of the penance-place the pinnacles of the Tolbooth showed ominously

"Foul fall it! the hole stinks like braxy mutton!"

At the Borderman's exclamation a hoarse yell of laughter went up from the long hall into which a sergeant had just shoved the prisoners. Through air thick with impurity the scanty light threw a sickly shine over the teeming crowd, that broke and intermingled in its groups like some ghastly procession of the Sins. Men lounging against the greasy walls waged with hideous smiles on the efforts of two women who held a shrinking girl by the arms, graduating her in their own school. A die-throw from them, a young man was rooking a country bumpkin at cards, scotching his prey's alarm and repentance by steaming renewals of the glass at his elbow. In a corner a knot of frowsy, toothless hags crouched about a sleeper, mouthing their triumph over the pockets they were plundering. As the new-comers showed in the doorway, a woman threw herself forward, beckoning and smiling in a travesty of coyness.

"Here are two proper men for us, luckies!" she cried. "Welcome, sirs, to this Garden o' Eden, so-called for that none leaves it wi'out mair kennin' o' guid an' evil than he brought in!"

At her words the hoarse laughter went up again, changing into a growl of disappointment as the pair entering baulked with foot and shoulder the door shutting them in.

"Hell's self! you miscalled it none, Guaid! Here, a French pistole to bestow us in some place where Satan's a wee less at home!"

"There's the Burgher's Room for folk wi' puises, and the Tron Room for city-sweeps, and the Black Hole for those who winna be content elsewhere!" growled the sergeant.

"The Burgher's Room then, with a murrain on ye! Have the Parliament headed all the gentlemen in the land, that you don't know two when you see them?"

In spite of his reckless speech, the Hope breathed

more freely when the Burgher's Room, deserted for once of other occupants, received him and his companion. The handsome face had a rare gravity as he took stand under the barred window.

"Rot my soul, if I would not die of prison as surely as a robin of a cage!" he cried. "Come, brother, you're not a lass of sixteen to sit mum in the presence of a pair of breeches, let's have your name and anything else that may cheat the night of an hour!"

"Adam Gordon of Brackley is my name," responded the other. "My name and my sword is about all my share of this world's goods."

"And a cursed cool head in a fight!" interrupted Esmé. "If I saved you from hamshekelling, you saved me the being spitted like a hawk on a barndoor by the iron that had learnt its master's fondness for being in the rear!" He made a step forward, with outstretched hand, but stopped short, eyes fixed on Gordon's face. "If we were drinking to 'save the ladies,' what name would you toast?" he demanded abruptly.

"I know no ladies, and care for fewer!" returned Gordon.

"Why then, we're friends!" shouted Esmé, diving for the other's hand. He looked honestly and curiously at Gordon, in the midst of his hearty clasp. "What grudge has Major Weir against you?" he asked.

"Major Weir of the West Bow? None, unless he is of them who count obligations as offences. By chance I was of service to him in a small matter but two days back."

Esmé threw himself on the cushion-naked settle.

"We needn't set the cooks at the funeral meats for the Last o' the Fools yet, syne I believed a word out of the slee old Covenanter's mouth!" he remarked. "An hour ago he was singing and saying to me that I should haste and away to cut your throat, for that he could as surely guess as e'er a mother anent the when o' her crying-time, that ye were for making your sweetheart out o' mine!"

The tawny eyes surveyed him

"Weir threeped at you to pick a quarrel with me ? "

"With one Adam Gordon of Brackley, lodging somewhither about the Grassmarket He prayed to be kept from harsh judgments, quo' he, but he had an inkling that yon Adam Gordon had found favour in the eyes of my pretty cousin Chrystal Hope ! "

At sound of the lightly-spoken name Gordon started from where he had leant with folded arms against the door, taking up his walk through the narrow space

"For the good turn I owe you I will be frank with you," he said suddenly, bringing himself to anchor before the Hope "I told you but now that I know little of and care less for women, and so true was it that though this morning I saw and spoke with her you name, your challenge of a toast did not so much as put me in mind of her ! " He paused "Yet our paths run together for a space, and should she call on me for aid she has the claim of any other comrade, though it is neither her gold hair nor dowry that links me with her ! "

Esmé stared at him half resentfully

"Riddle-me-ree ! Your answer makes nothing plain but your impudence ! "

"Forgive boasting, sir, but the strongest sword in the school of Besnard of Rennes has not much need for impudence," Gordon retorted.

"The strongest sword in Besnard's school ! Why, man, that was he they told me of in Paris, who for three days held his wooden castle against all challengers, with a return for every parade, and a flanconade of his own that would vex the devil himself ! "

The other shrugged, foreign fashion

"I never had such an adversary on my hands ! The great Condé came nearest to him, and he was too fond of high carte "

"By Heaven, then you're the man ! " Esmé ran his hand through his curling hair "Tell me, does old Sing-with-the-Saints-and-Sin-with-the-Sinners know this of you ? "

"Major Weir ? He saw me one to three when I

struck in to the help of his party, ambushed by a stripling who beyond doubt minted at carrying off Mistress Hope "

" Ha, Dandy Jock, play-acting his romaunts again ! So the old psalm-singer saw what you could do with a bit of steel, you say ! " Esmé laughed shortly " Troth then, when he steekit the door of his tabernacle behind me to-night, he must have given thanks that the sheets were spreading for my downlying in Death his hostelry ! "

" By the royal blood that rolls between our parties, I have no kindness for Covenanters ! Yet you cannot think that one so godly and well-beseen, forbye one so outspoken in condemnation of all differing from him, as is Major Weir, could be thus treacherous ? Granted," a disconcerting recollection of Major Weir's denial of all knowledge of the mysterious key flashed across Gordon's mind, " that in the dealing with an enemy the conscience of the godly is apt to have taken furlough the day before, yet you seem to be neither Covenanter nor Malignant, Crophead or Cavalier, has Major Weir ought of a ground to take a spite at *you* ? "

" Never a one, except as the raven spites the coulterneb or the fox the hound ! " laughed Esmé " I never laid eyes on him till four days ago, but we are natural born enemies, nevertheless and notwithstanding ! My bristles lift of themselves when I come within smell of him ! Mark me, for all his preaching and praying, he'll make devil's bones yet, as surely as ever cold capon did ! "

He stopped, a thoughtful frown coming on the careless face

" Yet you're right so far that I can make it worth old Cheat'em's while to stand in with me," he began afresh " My death would cost him the loss of twelve thousand pounds Scots "

The attitude of the listener whetted his mood for confidence

" There's a bargain between us," he went on " For the sweet sake of a full year of Clear Havens rents and fiars, the old gentleman will wink at my

making a clear sweep of little Chrystal and Clear Havens together ! ”

“ Two men against one maid ! Well, the odds may not be so heavy as they seem, there’s little manhood in the matter ! ”

Esmé flushed darkly

“ *Peste*, brother ! we look to see Charles and not *le grand Cyrus* crowned king in Scone ! ” he deprecated “ Leave romances to the women ! ”

“ Since when in Scotland have chivalry and honour been counted matters of romance ? ”

“ As well I as another,” returned Esmé sullenly “ If ’twas ‘hands off’ with me, the lass and her tocher would be gobbled up by Tod Sandy, even wee Jock is not so big a fool as to let an old maid grow in Chrystal’s shoes ”

“ If there are so many suitors as you say, how came Major Weir, foe as you deem him, to make his bargain with *you* ? ”

The hint of scornful disbelief in the question went by the Hope unheeded In the pause that fell, a fierce light kindled slowly in his face

“ Damnation ! if the fox plays double ! ” he shouted suddenly “ Was it the chance of plotting with him unobserved that Sandy had in his head when he planned to keep him prisoner in the camp ? ” He sprang to his feet in towering excitement “ Faith, it fits ! The black-snouted hypocrite in fear for his skin on the hill making believe to bargain with me, over what he had already come to terms on with Sandy the Fox ! Ay, and thought to apay my jeers and flouts through your sword last night, besides ridding himself of a witness to his doubleness ! ”

The hands at his sides clenched white

“ Zounds ! why did the lass slip through my fingers this morning, when by this time we should have been showing heels to all in Scotland whose profit it is to know me done for ! I’ve put my craig into St Johnstone’s tippet by coming here when Tod Sandy hounded the countryside out against me for the killing of the brat whom ’tis like he slew himself to have wherewith

to trump up the accusation, but may I roast to the ribs in hell if I stir a step out of Embro' without Chrystal Hope ! ”

The morning had stolen upon the prisoners at unawares. The air lightening in the Burgher's Room put a pallor on the two faces, the one fixed in thought, the other distorted with impotent fury. Esmé battered at their door, as if its resistance was to him an unfriendly omen, he staggered back on its sudden opening, heralding the appearance of the lieutenant of the Town Guard with a batch of underlings.

“ You, sir, can go forth,” he remarked to Gordon, surveying his jailors with his usual Cavalier bearing. “ It is to be hoped that the incarceration will have instilled into you a caution against tuzieing on the causeys, the whilk thing stinks in the nostrils of the worshipful Parliament ”

With a contemptuous shrug Gordon moved forward, turning to slip his arm within Esmé's. The lieutenant stepped between.

“ Is this your man, sir ? ”

At the appeal a figure stood forth from behind the soldiers, displaying the red hair and sallow face of Sandy Hope.

“ Ay ! ” said he briefly.

“ Then, Esmé Hope, I indict you in the name of the Lord Advocate for the murder of a child known as Blind Hughie the See-er, in the parish of Spurtle-shaws ! ” recited the lieutenant glibly. He signed to his soldiers to narrow in, barely in time to baulk the young man's fierce bound forward.

“ The trick's yours, Sandy ! ” shouted his cousin. “ Judas himself could not have bettered ye ! But a trick's no' the game ! ”

“ Friends once, friends aye ! ” Gordon grasped his hand, speaking in a quick undertone. “ The Tolbooth's not hell, that a man once in cannot win out ! ”

The Guard thrust between, and Gordon drew back with studied haughtiness to let the informer by.

The dregs of the Guardhouse had been spilt into the open, to disappear like water shed upon the sand. Gordon looked towards the rosiness dappling the sky behind the towers of Holyrood.

"Over late and over light to seek the key," he reflected, as he made way down a footworn slope towards the Cowgate.

The vigil that Adam had kept in the Guardhouse had been watched through by his comrade at her window. The moon had worn threadbare thin, but with persistent patience Chrystal knelt on, arms crossed on the sill, ears strained for something other than the noises of the old house.

Esmé's drunken shoutings had raised more than echoes behind. With thoughts circling, now near and now far, but loyal to the centre where a still silent hope nested, the girl had heard the threat in the tipsy leave-taking with a pang of alarm. Her old fears swooped down upon her like birds of prey, bearing her into a desert of vague uncertainty, in which nothing but her apprehensions were tangible, as the night crept on and up, seeming to rise in a cold tide about the passionate heart, she felt as though the man who had chosen her for comrade lay smitten into helplessness at her feet, she herself bound to fight for both.

"He lent me his trust, and I will warden it for him, ay will I!" she vowed, fierce as a mother-bird on her nest.

The moon was scarcely more than a vapour in the sky, when a rowel of thought brought her to her feet in a bound. In her pocket, forgotten till that moment, lay the forged key.

Pale with terror Chrystal stood, gazing with wide, frightened eyes at the two, real and dummy, lying in her hand. In an hour or two at best Major Weir must discover his loss, his instant suspicion would without doubt fall upon her, she who had betrayed to him her knowledge of the key.

With a wild thought of laying the false one in his chamber while he slept, she was midway across the

floor, when she stopped short, shaken by her girlish shudderings. What if in the passage-way the dark man should even then be stealing on *her* door?

But the little comrade had good blood in her. Gordon, facing and fighting his odds that night, had not been more game than the girl, stirring at last from the pause in which she had sought and rejected a dozen desperate expedients, to loose with quick hands the gold hair that fell in curling waves about her.

That fancy of fighting for one who was powerless to fight, was strong upon her, with her device quickening in her wits. To hide the trust she held for Gordon beyond dream of search, to conceal the false key to reward search, she herself even, it might be, hard-pressed by examination, producing it from its concealment—the plan, simple enough, would confuse the scent.

The little hands moved feverish-fast as she snapped the dule bodice-lace in two, tying the key wrought that day by Lazare Géois about her neck.

Gordon alone in his tuzlie had not shown such courage as the girl laying herself down in her bed, lest suspicion should find food in her being on foot in the night. Fighting her fears she lay, a resolute coward, every fibre a-quiver at a starting board, a mouse on his adventure, yet as strong to guard her trust perilous as any paladin of them all.

Lying thus with will-sealed eyelids, her nerves gradually quieted. Sleep, brooding like an atmosphere on the world, sank on her, feigning had passed into reality before she knew. The turn of the night, the hour when watchers by the dying set the window wide for the passing soul, when heart and brain, vexed with vigil, acknowledge the healing touch of the new day and drop from waking to slumber, worked upon Chrystal, she lay, soft-breathing, asleep.

What was it that wrought to her awakening?

The swallows in their mudcups under the eaves were astir, but their twitter had not broken Chrystal's sleep. A hand, stealthy as a "temptation," was stealing over her.

Her fear had come upon her

Numb as the hare run down by the dogs, the girl lay, unable for cry or movement. The fingers of the dark man were at her throat, fumbling with the button of her nightrail. It yielded, the gloating hand met the key, warm from the snowdrop-curve of the girl-neck. Gently the gliding hand drew out the lace, tied in front in its bowknot.

The hand, the hand, lingering on the leaping of her heart! A voice, like the hand, stealthy, creeping—

“Waking, you wake, little fool, who thought to cheat eyes made for the darkness and ears for the silence. This once I give you grace, learn wisdom by it!”

Like a shadow the inquisitor had slipped into the grey dawning, the withdrawal of the wicked hand the only sign to the girl with the sleeping eyelids that the fearful searcher was gone.

For moments yet she lay weak with the horror, then she slid from bed to floor. For the secret of the gold hair was safe, and the man who had vaunted such fearsome powers had been foiled by comrade Chrystal.

CHAPTER IX

THE GALLANT OF THE TWO HEARTS

THE day was no more than running up into the dark when Chrystal stood upright in spite of aching limbs. She must go to the man who would not come to her, so much was clear in a brain strangely confused, whirling with the happenings of her stay in Edinburgh town. The memory of eyes tawny drew her like a magnet, as she threw a plod on of the Lowlands over garments instinctively dainty, hasty adjustment notwithstanding, and lifted the latch with fingers in which only the will was steady. The door drawn back by inches, afforded crack enough at last for a slight lass to slip through, Chrystal passed out, with a shriek for the farther side. The first step of evasion had brought her full face with Major Weir.

"You rise early" Not a tone of the hushed evil that rang yet in her ears was in the level voice, the composed countenance gave no hint as to whether its owner had cheated his bed to watch at heaven's door or at Chrystal's. "Where are you for? and why are ye scared as an evildoer at sight of me?"

Before the sedateness of the man's speech and bearing, the girl felt herself back in her perplexities. With an effort she met his overbearing eyes.

"Eh, man, since even to fly in the face of Providence is reckoned ill-doing, I might well give the bit cry at pouncing out thus on one I deemed still in the bedcovers, you, no doubt, being better used than I to the mouse's morning carol in place of the lavrock's, I'm for trying if a mouthful of fresh air may not be come by even in these town streets."

Major Weir barred the movement in which she would have stepped boldly past him

"Had your godless kinsman not espied you once already in such streeplings through the town, I had been spared his seeking my house this night past, blasphemously vowing that syne he was forced to fly the country for the murder of Blind Hugh the See-er he would at least carry you off with him. It is therefore for your own welfare that you should go neither in nor out for the present, since beyond these four walls is your danger"

With eyes that saw nothing but a horror, Chrystal stood tense

"Hughie dead!" she murmured "Eh, why suld his ghost house here—*here*?" She flung out her hands with a passionate cry "Esme *never* came behind him, holding him down to kiss Death in the burn where he played! Never! never!"

Major Weir took a step forward, bringing his face, mortal-pale, near hers

"How know you *how he died*, girl? Hold such words behind your teeth, lest they should prove hempseed for a rope to hang your drunken sweetheart in! He swears that a false step and a rotten foothold sent the blind imp to his death"

His breath seared Chrystal's face, but she stood her ground

"Balow, my lammie, my wee bonnie lamb,—but ye came to no hurt from Esmé's hand! The lad's no saint—as little as he is sweetheart of mine,"—the gibe rankled beyond apparent reason,—“but he's a man for all that, he would think shame to harm a bairn, *he*”—the taunt was irresistible—“would think shame to steal into a lassie's chamber, to win back what in the first of it he had denied the having as stoutly as Apostle Peter!”

Breathless with daring, Chrystal flung the defiance of her look at him. The pallor, the harshness, had fled together from Major Weir's face, the hazel eyes, sober with inquiry, met hers full

"Chrystal Hope, as your guardian I demand to know *who* did the like?"

"You yourself, and no later than this morrow!"

The accusation faltered on the girl's lips, meeting the steady look, grave now with a certain concern, fixed on her face

"Child, to what purpose should I steal into a lass' chamber?"

Fronting the blank, unspoken denial, the girl's brain reeled

"For the key—the key you forswore the knowledge of yesterday! First a lie, and then a theft, and now a lie again—eh, a bonny trinity!"

She rained the taunting words like hailstones on him, to break the utter frankness of his look. Like hailstones, they melted into nothingness

"Poor child!" The kindness that the prayer-assembly knew was in Major Weir's voice, his eyes, it met Chrystal like a stunning blow. "This dark house is no place for one of your years, the execution, too, belike has bred fever in you, sending ill dreams to vex your sleeping." He sighed heavily. "*Yet 'twas thus Grizel began!*"

The last words, muttered as he turned about, completed Chrystal's overwhelming. Groping as though a blindness had come upon her, she reached her bed, to sink on it as if the foundations of her earth had given way. Thinking of the candour of his eyes, hearing again the utter sincerity of his voice, the girl fell to doubting her own senses in the seeming impossibility of doubting the man who had found excuses for her accusation of him, wild fears came to lash her pitiful bewilderment into storm

Trembling as in an ague-exie, she buried her face in her burning hands, to steady, if it might be, the whirling temples. Something solid as a fact met her piteous fingers, as one drowning in roaring waters grasps at a branch rooted in firm earth, so Chrystal grasped at it. The key which Major Weir had denied!

Chrystal stood upon her feet, and knew she had

still "I am but Mad Grizel, there's none need rack brain over what meaning, if any, lies in word or ways of mine, but you—are you mad too that you should have countered brother Thomas' will by so much as a hair's-breadth, that you should have tripped him lying, and thereafter placed the proof of his lie on your bosom, plain for the finding when he sought—that you should have given him ground to take a grudge against you? Ay, there's madness in your blood, lass, that you should do the like,—sweet love-madness!"

Rose-red, love's livery, over cheek and brow and chin, as the whisper that came as a thunderclap of revelation sounded through the quiet room. All at once Chrystal knew why the thought of being instrument to the man with the unsmiling eyes was two-edged with a pleasure and a pain, why recollection of his championship of her should sting with suggestion of a price paid for her services. She knew all at once she was no knight-errant of womanhood, doing devoir for a Cause, she knew herself woman ardent with woman's love of service towards a man whom she knew the man to her. By the leap of her pulses at the thought of his approach, Chrystal knew that it had been given Grizel, by no second sight other than that of their common womanhood, to read the truth.

She threw herself on her knees beside the woman.

"Ye have the word," she murmured breathlessly, "but till this moment I knew it not! Eh, woman, I must see him—speak with him! it's no' for nothing that the night waned without bringing him, that before now he has not been here to seek me!"

The grey-haired woman lifted her to her feet, drawing her by the hand from the room, to point from the staircase-landing to the house-door, its great bar locked across it.

"One came hither a matter of two hours since, and knocked in broad daylight," she whispered. "But 'tis ill opening the door when brother Thomas

steeks it, and at after he had knocked his fill he went his ways ! ”

“ As I must go ! ” The blushes came and went in the girl’s face, but a steady purpose came and stayed “ Grizel, I must forth ! ”

A gasp of recollection of Esmé—by last night’s evidence as well as Major Weir’s warnings—hot-foot on her track broke the impetuous speech With that overheard, half-understood threat of her reckless kinsman in mind, the possibility flashed across her mind that the Barras, in which she had been once already by so nearly run down, might be a district of suspicion to Dare-the-Deil Hope or his scouts, the chance that he or his might even then be loitering in wait about it reinforced a repugnance to face again the uncanny sight of the Genoia twins Some other trysting-place must be found, since the purpose to be quit of her trust before a new night was strong in her, mated with another Chrystal knew, were the price of her resolve such terror as had stocked her heart-beatings in that day’s dawn, that she and none other should meet certain tawny eyes who as yet saw her not as girl but as tool To stand face to face with Adam Gordon, to bid him own loyalty could wear petticoats as well as doublet and hose—the vision by its very brightness dazzled her hopes and fears from looking beyond Firm on the threshold of her purpose, desire seemed to her youth its own pledge of fulfilment First to see him, speak with him—of so much of the future she would hold seizin

Wandering in the miz-maze of her thoughts, she started at meeting Grizel’s vivid eyes

“ Ay, lass, you’re for casting a charm on proud heart and hard to win ? ”

“ I would hold light the heart won by charms ! ” The girl’s denial was given the lie by the girl’s blushes Grizel turned back to her spinning

“ No hatching love in the first of it wi’out them,” she murmured to the sound of her shuttle “ A soft voice, a peep o’ the eyes, a hand given and taken,—

charm me here, charm me there, the *he* that's mated, as acorn cup, for his *she* ! Before now a lass has won a lad by the woven charm of golden hair, and lost him thereafter for want of woman-wit under it ! " The strange laugh crackled out " Maybe brother Thomas' bolts and bars will but let young Love in," she cried, " so be not over brisk in withdrawing them 'Tis man's part *to have*, and 'tis woman's *to withhold*, and man or dog are ne'er keener for a bone than when they've been keepit on their hinderlan's for it a wee ! "

" Hut, woman, withhold your wisdom, for there's no need of it here ! " Chrystal frowned and smiled, blushed and bridled " 'Tis no love-tryst that I'm for keeping, yet forth to it I must ! " The determination in face and voice was magnetic " There's a house in the Barras is sealed to me as I fear, but there's a man in yon house I must speak with Grizel, 'tis yourself must be blackfoot¹ in this matter ! "

The spell of her will seemed to control the elder woman, the wandering eyes dwelt on Chrystal thoughtfully Something of the dignity of her trances came upon her, silent for moments, yet speaking in a strange voice when she spoke at last

" To spin a thread will thicken to a rope to draw ye white out o' this house of the Dark, is to be my task then ! " said she " Ay, lass, to keep the white white still, I will do't, my spindle has danced long enough to the will of the staff ! What's your pleasure ? "

" To have a word whispered in the ear of one Master Gordon, lodging above the Italian mortmaker in the Barras "

Grizel nodded " The thread will be like to turn to hemp if yon gentle is seen about this house again," she said in the same quiet voice " Thomas Weir's five wits are at work already upon the secret to be unlocked by the key which yon gallant wi' the court-curls sets store enough by to steal Brother Thomas saw in you but a cat's-paw, the key taken from over

¹ Messenger

your heart this morning lies next his till he has spelt out the riddle ' "

" So much the more need to speak with him I name " Chrystal instinctively avoided a reassuring touch on the gold hair and its secret " And if there I dare not go, and here he may not come, then elsewhere So much from me, Grizel, 'tis for you to bring the place of tryst back to me "

The woman was already assuming hood and cloak She beckoned Chrystal with her down the stairs, and pushed her in the direction of her own chamber

" Bide ye there, and open to no voice but mine," she said, turning, Chrystal noticed with surprise, not to undo the fastenings of the house-door, but to disappear into the room set apart for the uses of the master of the house

With the first step taken to her purpose, last night's vigil asserted itself by overpowering weariness in the girl left her lone in a silent house Hope—evergreen wind-sown in the world-wilderness beyond the quickset hedge of the Lost Garden—was putting out fresh shoots in her soul, soothed by its tonic balm she, or ever she knew, had yielded herself to sleep A hand curved under that which the pretty curls held in trust, she slept, in spite of the dark image of Major Weir, in spite of fear of graceless Esmé, in spite even of that worst thought of all, a man with unsmiling eyes coming somehow to his hurt

The moon was coming to her own again when the girl drifted out of sleep A dream that had been pleasant lay about her for an instant, then she was broad awake at a tapping on her door, she had opened before she remembered to challenge the knocker. A flush rose to the curls as she saw Grizel without

The woman bent to whisper over the threshold, putting a finger to Chrystal's lips in sign of caution

" Do ye ken a man wi' Judas hair and cunning eyes under birstlin' brows? " she whispered " Such a one has sat long in talk with brother Thomas, though, as I make my guess, Thomas was but scantily pleased when he first beheld him standing on his doorstep "

Trembling exceedingly, Chrystal heard her out

"Tod Sandy! Sandy in town!"

"To fulfil the hanging up of rival Esmé out o' harm's way—so much escaped him when I was filling the cups," Grizel completed

Shudder on shudder, repugnance, revolt unspeakable That resolve which had been before but a girlish hope crystallised suddenly to the girl who loathed with sick loathing this third wooer of hers, to a passion of desire to place Adam Gordon and the strength in him between herself and harm

"What wanted he with Major Weir?"

Grizel shook her head at the question of white lips

"Be it what it may, he went wanting it And by Thomas being sharpset for supper an hour before the time, I'm jalousin' that he too is forth and away for the night, so *Horse and hattock* may be the word with us, as with the fairies wending it to Elfland after a midnight's gambol in their rings For your gallant of the Two Hearts trysts ye on the Burghmuir at dawn"

Grey eyes got no leave to sink "How? two hearts?"

"The one ye've lost to him, lass, and his own, since he's not changed it away for yours yet! But come, we must eat and flit, for troth! should the staff and *its man* catch ye in your passage, the tryst would be ill to keep The Burghmuir under the moon is like to be kindlier to ye than brother Thomas, did he glimpse ye were for putting your will above his again!"

The colour that was displeasure's scarlet, not pleasure's crimson, had thrilled into Chrystal's face at the beginning of the sentence, but her young hunger was growingly present with her, the meal spread in the upper room was welcome enough to stay even her impatience to be on her adventure Her head whirled still, and her body ached with the throbbing of every pulse, but sleep and food had heartened her when she followed Grizel once more down the staircase, towards the room whence she

had stolen the key Grizel gave but little time to any involuntary shiver on the threshold, with steps stealthy as Chrystal's own had been on the previous night, she crossed the apartment to a door set in one corner, from which a winding stair ran down. The stairs were in darkness, at the bottom another narrow door admitted the women into a close that was no more than a crevice between walls.

"There's more goes in and out of this rear door of Weir's 'land' than is seen by the godly of the Bow!" Grizel muttered with her mocking emphasis, and closed the door behind them.

The way fetched left Edinburgh behind, on its windy eyrie, the black castle, eagle-fierce, poised on the whitening night. Chrystal had glances of curiosity through the twilight for the scarlet cloaks of the goldsmiths, the bare-legged salt-wives, the blue gowns of the beggars, but the passing world on its side had few looks for two plaid-muffled figures pursuing a prudent pace along the Grassmarket, and out through the West Port. The wind in the reeds soughed ghostily when their path led them beside a broad water, the herons swinging up gorged from it at the footsteps threading a track that made for the hills, down dale and up hill all one to it in its pilgrimage. The little feet used to the Lammermuirs welcomed the woodpaths of the Bughmuir at first, then they flagged, Chrystal sighed a sigh of relief when Grizel came to a standstill.

"There are braver roof-trees in many a loan hereabouts, but the hosts here lack tongues to spear at ye," she said, guiding the girl round the corner of a shed, open on its fourth side to wind and weather for errant midnight traveller. In the white night the shapes of huddled sheep were seen, their fleecy presence, however strong-smelling, homelike to the girl out from Clear Havens. Her weariness rocked her, as, nestled a third between two helpless lambs, she awaited the morrow setting in towards the east, out among the sheep on the Bughmuir, Chrystal slept sound as they.

The colour that had died with the day was sharing its resurrection when Chrystal woke with the sheep. The flame-blue of harebells, the yellow of gorse, the red of pimpernel glinting in green grass, gave greeting as she slipped from the shed where Grizel still slumbered heavily, to bathe her face in the stream that betrayed its whereabouts with a song. The cold water and the spring of her hope braced her, waiting by the tinklings of Almond water for the woman she presently perceived awake and making towards her.

"I go to twist yon thread we spoke of. Bide you here, for him of the Two Hearts."

"Eh; not here in the open!" With the instinct to seek cover of the creature for whom the hunt is up, Chrystal turned towards the trees that were outposts of a wood blocking the vistas. "Bring him here—and let him ask the road at after of the bluebells!"

A motion of her hand speeded her messenger, she was alone on the moor. She strayed at random, plucking the harebells ringing the carillons that fail to sound for fleshly ears, deafened as were Chrystal's by the strong beating of the hearts on which the drummer Passion plays the march of Life. Anticipation ached in her to the finger-tips, she was incapable of thought, only of sensation, the sensation of quivering towards a magnet.

Where a wild cherry-tree showed white among the sturdier growth, as one fancies a Maid Marion among the green-clad foresters, Chrystal pricked up her pretty head to the listening. The blue day was an hour or so old. A step free and firm was on the last year's bracken, the upleaping of the girl-heart needed nothing of her eyes. No need to hide, yet she plunged deeper into the green gloom that might screen a maid's blushes, stripping, with fingers that trembled, the flower-bells along the path she went.

Down the blue roadway came the footsteps, after no more than a brief cast about. The girl had turned to bay in the harebell-strewn tracks, the man with

the unsmiling eyes stopped short. In front of him he saw his comrade, veiled in gold hair that glistened, holding in the hands from which a great sheaf of blossoms had fallen, the key which he had set his life in the scales to fetch from Edinburgh town.

"The man was the one to break tryst!" Chrystal forced herself to the gay rally as she laid her trust in the firm brown hand. "That you left the moon and me to wear through the night our lone, near hand lost you the key, no fault of Major Weir that he but took the dummy from me as I slept!"

"No fault of mine!" Gordon, eying the key narrowly as he spoke, had no eyes for the ebbing of Chrystal's blood from her cheeks, the lift of the gold head at his curt tone. "I was caged in the Guardhouse, being caught by the pestilent Town Guard in a street tulzie some drunken fellows forced on me."

"Fie, sir!" The girl's voice held an unexpected defiance. "No a sevensnight in Embio', and the Guardhouse already! Troth, now ye've gotten a' ye came for, ye'd best show heels to the town or 'twill be the Tolbooth next!"

She stood before him, binding up the hair that had hidden his secret, the smiling curve of her lips set in pride.

"If it was the gallows, I would not leave Edinburgh yet!" Gordon returned with sombre determination. "The man who fought on my side in the brawl lies in the Tolbooth you name, if he had not been netted in my quarrel he would have been out of reach of the suit taken against him by his kinsman. I do not leave Edinburgh till I have got Esmé Hope out of the prison where he would not be but for me!"

"Good hanging to both o' ye!"

The unsteady laugh startled the man into turning his moody eyes on the face, five minutes before sweet with young roses, now pitiful wan. The harebells about Chrystal's feet were not fading faster than the hopes with which she had summoned this man, whom yet she saw as a protector rather than a lover, to her

side False hopes, his presence enough to blight them, bold though they took leave to be in his absence, cheating her into seeing her need a heriot of service from him False hopes that deserved to die, yet there was another, still and lurking, worst traitor of all, which Chrystal would not own to herself lay slain in her girlish heart, since she had never owned it to herself living in spite of her, as the child not yet come to the birth has its being under the bosom As the misadventure of the unborn babe bereaves her who has borne it without yet having right to call herself mother, so the death of this hope which the girl's innocence had hardly recognised stirring within her, chilled with vague sorrow, perplexing by its namelessness Sore with a sense of loss, set on edge by feeling herself pitted against her world, Chrystal flamed into the anger that is one of the vizards lent by Pride to Pain The grey eyes flashed defiance into the tawny

"I'll back to my Major Weir, I'm thinking he's all the friends I'm like to have"—

"Major Weir? You mean to betray me, girl?"

The lines of scornful suspicion deepened in the bronzed face above her, wiping out at least the deadly indifference His hand, steel lined with velvet, came on her shoulder

"You are true comrade?" he challenged

"Your business lies with the key, sir, and the key's in your pouch, so, Hands off!"

"Your answer first"

"I have none for you!" Chrystal struggled under his hand, a feminine satisfaction making itself felt in her at the stormlight in tawny eyes

"You will find an answer to a question asked by me," he said, his tone for the first time losing the note of careless superiority persistently but impotently resented by her "My affairs are of an importance that must not splinter on a lass' humours Is there treachery in you?"

Chrystal opened lips to declare her purpose of silence, and shut them again wordlessly

"Speak!" He admonished her with an imperative gesture

Silence still

"Speak! you win not free till you do!"

Silence stubborn, shared for a space by the man holding his prisoner with the grasp that neither tightened nor slackened for any inward chafing

"I have taught a bird to speak before now—and been thereafter deaved by its chattering!" he observed at last with his sudden smile "All that's needed is patience on the one side, and perception of a master's will on the other!"

The tinge of mockery in his tone effected what his imperativeness had not, it stung Chrystal into speech

"You are no master of mine!" she cried

"And since I am not, can neither beat you nor kiss you into obedience," retorted Gordon, smiling still "The patience-road is longer, but will reach the goal syne if not soon Meanwhile a spring morning on the Burghmuir is no bad thing I, as little as you seem to be, am in no haste for the reek of Embro' When you weary of my company, you will doubtless give me the answer for which I wait"

His ironical humour was insupportable, it troubled tears of helpless rage to the upspringing

"I will—to be rid of you!" Imposed on by his will, she faced him, powerless to stay her tears, dauntless in spite of them "I leave broken faith to men! Men who speak a woman fair till she serves them, and thereafter league with her bitterest foes! Fool that I was," she lashed herself with her own scorn, "to fret myself lest you should have suffered harm by Esmé's sword, and him and you doubtless coming to terms over a flask of the Guardhouse best anent the wedding of me!"

He had dropped the prisoning hand, and now stood surveying her, obviously as surprised by her accusation as by the suddenness of her capitulation

"You are mad, child! What is't to me who weds you? Had you lived with others than Covenanters,

you would know that a Cavalier does not wipe out one debt with another That to help your cousin Hope out of the pother I landed him in does not spell forgetting your service to me ' ”

The abrupt impatience of the tone acted astringently on the girl's excitement She swept him a curtsey where she stood

“ I would have you forget it, sir, as fully as I shall forget that I once put faith in a Cavalier ”

She turned from him, but he barred her way once more, mastering her hand

“ Will't have a Cavalier break bargain, child ? How stood it between us ? ”

“ You were to learn, sir, that—a woman could be brave and leal as a man ! Learn, too, she can be as proud,—and learn no more from me ! ”

The hand struggled in his, detaining, broke loose She fled between the tree-stems, Gordon watching the slender vehement figure with a certain interest, the interest of a traveller striking into a country hitherto untravelled by him

CHAPTER X

THE DUEL OF HUNTER'S TRYST

FOR the silence and the shadows of the house in the West Bow ! The longing beat in Crystal's brain, scourging the haste in which she sought to leave behind a memory salt as sorrow, bitter with mortifications. Smarting from the battle, she did not pause to reckon which dart rankled most cruelly. That defeat in the crossing of her will with Gordon's, which at another time would have sorely stung the little queen of Clear Havens, now was only a prick the more. Gordon, in his carelessly maintained impersonal attitude towards her, was hardly felt as yet to have dealt a wound, so cruelly did the realisation bite into her soul that no champion existed for her forlorn, against her unwelcome wooers, that the man in whose strength her hope had been silently exultant, cared so little for a hard-pressed comrade that he had openly professed himself pledged to help the adversary he had helped her once to foil. The impersonality with which masculine breadth plays the game, opponents nothing to it but for the hands they hold, could not be guessed at by the feminine creature with her inherent bias towards the concrete. To her woman's limitations a truce seemed a treachery.

Heedless of Grizel's breathed protests, Chrystal sped along, and saw nothing of the pleasant campaign, with the greens and browns and silver of its woods and tillage and streams, filling the world to edge of mountain or sea. Once, where the road hanging in sun and wind, was quartered, she started as the woman hurrying from the rear laid a guiding hand on her,

"Lass, lass, haste is like to come by a stumble!" she panted "If ye run so fleet, belike will ye run into brother Thomas' arms, and him asking where ye're running *from*! The chance o' his kenning nought o' our moonlight flitting is small enough, no need to tunc it for want o' care!"

A choir of bird-voices in a field beyond the wall of piled stones by which the women were passing, prevented the answer Chrystal might have made. Over earth fresh ploughed, a curious company were looting, seagulls raping and roving among curlews, starlings, and swallows, a crew of pirates ruffling it among a land-mob. The quarrel of earth and sea was maintained by their champions, feasting and fighting, striking and screaming, they dived and swooped, to scatter suddenly with a volley of beating wings. Plumb through the blue, a hawk dropped stonelike, Chrystal, perception of things outside touched awake in her for a moment, heaved a sigh at the armistice induced by the common enemy.

"If Esmé would learn that lesson, at least I should have one foe less to fear!" thought she, with ominous recollection of the dark man whom she shrewdly reckoned no friend to Esmé, whom she could not reckon friend to her.

Pain had taken to itself other weapons when she turned back to her thoughts after the instant's distraction. Shame that she should have built her girl's sweet secret fancies where no foundation existed for them, throbbed hot in her, insight that she was no more than a tool which had served its purpose and possessed no further value, probed mercilessly. That previous shy, not wholly intolerable consciousness of being chosen instrument by one whom she would have chosen to serve, had grown deadly sharp, whetted on that other consciousness of being no more than instrument. She had been used, cast aside, the pain of it all turned her mood to fever, the balm which she sought from inward vows never again to see him who had dealt such wounds to her, innocent, wrought no healing, but unspeakable dolour.

The little feet went slowly enough through the streets closing about them, imperceptibly to Chrystal, increasingly clouded with mental pain and bodily weakness. Grizel fetched roundabout ways, but she and her charge passed unmolested through the Vennel, and reached in safety the passage on which the back-entrance of the Weir "land" opened. Before the black turret that flanked the house, Grizel stopped, pressing a spring in the lintel. The door opened.

Waving Chrystal back, the other stole forward, evidently to reconnoitre. A smell of acrid smoke held the blackness, in which the gul waited for minutes that were long, before Grizel, descending, swept her again in silent haste out into the close. In the light the face in the grey hair seemed paler than its wont.

"Thomas sits up in his chalmers, preparing to himself a *Hand of Glory*!" she muttered in a voice that shook.

"A hand of glory?"

The echo that was a question was not answered yet. With furtive haste Grizel piloted towards the West Bow, bringing her within the tunnel-passage which went among the town-folk by the unsavoury name of the Stinking Close, and furnished approach to the front of Thomas Wen's habitation. Convinced by cautious spying that all was safe, she signed Chrystal forward, a couple of minutes more found the two in the familiarity of the living-room.

Grizel threw off her plaid with a sigh of satisfaction.

"The staff and its man are over busy to heed us," she whispered, "'tis aye thus when the flame is red under the crucible! Brother Thomas has unsteeked yon door that I might answer any who call, or win in or out on my housewife's do's, thought o' us is little like to enter the head intent on the glorious hand!"

"Again, what is this glorious hand?"

Grizel drew near, to speak as though the walls were spies.

"The hand o' a hanged man it behoves to be,

rowed, till the blood starts from the nails, in a rag o' the shroud he did not live to wear. Then corned wi' zimat and saltpetre must it be, and dried over a fire fed with vervain and fern for as long as the corbies find feeding on the corp! "

Witchcraft! witchcraft black! Chrystal shuddered
"What should such deil's cookery serve for?"

"Eh, the Hand of Glory is strong in divers," Grizel responded in the same tone of superstitious awe
"Wi' a candle dipt o' dead man's fat in's grip, hidden treasure—and though it be fathomed deep below sod—is revealed, and bolts and bars melt away like snails in salt before its shine. And as the snake bans by its e'en the bird beyond stir, so folk 'at ken rede that yon light roots in deadly terror all whom it's held before, till they can neither fight nor fly!"

Herself banned, like any soft-plumaged bird helpless to stay the approach of the slow-coiling serpent, Chrystal asked a breathless question—

"What wanted *he* with such deadly doings?"

"Bairn, bairn, seek to know nothing of us!"
The recital of superstition had inflamed afresh Grizel's mental weakness, the interval of sanity was giving place to her alternative condition of brooding melancholia. "As other bairns learn good at a mother's knees, so we evil, leave the hell-doomed brother and sister to walk the road they must, but keep ye your innocence!"

She took up a restless walk through the chamber

"Keep your innocence!" It was the charge o' a dying father to daughter Grizel, but her innocence died wi' him. Eh, father!" she cried out bitterly, "the love I bore yourself lost me, me with the witch-blood in my veins!"

She threw herself on her knees beside Chrystal, speaking in a hurrying whisper

"Did ye e'er ken the seeing one ye love pass from ye into the silence? Black silence, wi' your own voice rending your ears, and your praying hands full o' emptiness? I could not thole, and the blood of the witch, my mother, learnt me what to do!"

With a scream she started to her feet

"But though, like her o' Endor, I called up spirits, him whom to see but for one moment I had bartered away my soul never came to me! Syne kent I, that thinking sair to find him, I had lost him for aye, and for the last time I sat the night through and my lane in the chalmers in which a' is ordered like his i' the home-house in far Lanarkshire, and I cried his name in the darkness, and the sound wandered back to me like a curse! Then wi' the morn I stood up on my feet, and I kissed the bed-head where his dying head had lain, and went my ways from the chalmers, laying *that* on the doorsill which would keep it more siccar from such as me than the lock I turned behind me" Her voice broke in a jarring laugh "Ay, how goes the saw—

'Rowantree and red thread
Puts the witches to their speed'"

"The rowan's away the now!" Chrystal roused herself from her own terror for the soothing words "But, O woman, why abide in this house if you mislike it? Why should we not steal away with our two selves some ilk, where none would know tale or tidings of us?"

"Ay, lass! It must be to heaven we'se wend then, if ye will cheat the knowledge of the black staff!"

At the weird retort Chrystal shivered. The tall woman ceased her paces to and fro, to bend over her.

"Ye dowie to fear no danger yet. By that brother Thomas took ye to him, he needs ye, though what for I cannot guess." Grizel voiced her thoughts half-unconsciously. "It cannot be for *his usual*, since lasses are plenty nearer than the Border. And it must be *secret*, by the prayers he has made of late that he may walk clear in the sight of all men, infect by no plottings or plannings in high places—since Thomas aye prays against the trespass of the moment, and makes o's prayers, dust thrown in

folk's eyes, that they may not see the footsteps of the sin that's companying beside his own' And that as yet he has not paid ye the wage he is owing ye, for crossing his will in yon matter of the key, it must be *soon* ! ”

Chrystal's shriek sent the echoes calling through the house. The utterances of a crazed woman had proved the utmost the slight creature's endurance could bear, the fever bred of the tension of weeks, and the breathless adventures of the last days, leapt out fiercely on her. Chrystal came out of the swoon in which she had fallen into Grizel's arms, only to cry that Adam Gordon was carrying her to be married to Esmé in the Tolbooth. She knew nothing of the strength that bore her presently to her chamber, or of the herb-drinks which no unpractised hand ministered to her sickness.

Chrystal lay and burnt with fever, and shrieked till the quiet house became a Cave of the Echoes, but there were spaces of healing when cool draughts came to her lips, and touches cold with spring-water were about her throbbing head. The nights were white no longer when she woke in a clover-sweet twilight from a dream of Clear Havens to such tending, wooing her to unclothe languid eyes with a smile for the nurse who nursed so well. The smile died out in the eyes which met the humid hazel of Major Weir.

“Eh, sir, what means it ? ”

Chrystal, raised with a start on a weak arm, looked about. The shadows of the grim dwelling in the Bow had vanished, she had come to herself in the low-ceiled space of a cottage *ben*, its casement looking upon a grass-place where the rabbits were cropping a supper in the evening cool. The last sunbeams were casting quick-flitting shadow-rabbits among the furry congregation, but beneath the brown cottage thatch the light was no more than enough to reveal the two faces to one another.

“You have been sick, but the fever on you is past,” Major Weir returned with a reassuring intonation. It might be a debatable question as to whether

Angelical Thomas repented or not of the flaw of anger which had prompted him to repay Chrystal's upbraidings concerning the key and his visitation in the dawning, by the deadly spitefulness of suggestion of a seed of madness in her, but sober reflection could not fail to recall that his plans would be ill-suited by the gul, a-nursing for a purpose, being rendered unsound in body or mind "Some days since we conveyed you to this croft of Hunter's Tryst, hard by Coniston, that country air might the sooner restore strength in you, doubtless tried by town-sojourn "

The creaking of a corncrake in meadowland without came as a lullaby on Chrystal, she lay dreamy-content, too languid for any other attitude than a passive acceptance of the moment A movement from Weir roused her presently

"I must hence," he murmured, looking from the window before he passed out of the room with a certain haste Chrystal for the first time became aware of the presence of Grizel, seated in a corner, as her brother disappeared she came forward

"The dark sped him!" she said, looking in her turn towards the green, whence the rabbits had vanished in a flurry of upflung white scuts before the riding of a rider from the doorstone "Thomas and I share and share the tending o' ye between us, he the day and I the dark "

Chrystal, listening to the hoof-beats of Burd Ellen overriding the voice of the stream running under Bow Bridge, asked an idle question—

"Is he for faring back to Embro' the night?"

Grizel laughed "Thomas is one for taking no risks! Lass, your thread in the web he weaves bude to be a golden one, for he has spared no pains in medicining you—and there's many a leech could learn a trick or twain of his trade from Thomas Weir The potions he has brewed over the crucible would little have needed backing by the air of Hunter's Tryst, had Hunter's Tryst not offered handy hiding of ye from those who would fain have had the finding o' ye! More times than once has your gallant of the Two

The Duel of Hunter's Tryst 127

Hearts come knocking for your news, though, troth !
Angelical Thomas proved no newsmonger for him !
And the Judas-man has been coming and going, wi's
green eyes at their sharpest for the one he could not
win glimpse o' One, two, but there's a third to
keep ye safe from, lass, if ye are to serve the turn
brother Thomas, alone of us three, wots of ! "

" Is Esme won out of the Tolbooth ? " Chrystal
cried

The other shook her head " I have seen nought
of him The third I minted at is *another*,—and none
but himself can keep ye from him ! But by that
Thomas puts the road to Edinburgh between ye
before the nightfall that shall find him in the West
Bow and ye at Hunter's Tryst, 'tis no guesswork that
if by day Hunter's Tryst keeps ye from your gallants,
by night Hunter's Tryst keeps ye from *Thomas' self* ! "

" What mean you ? "

" Is the great candleshine of the Bow not light
enough for ye to read by't, that brother Thomas
scunners at the dark ? "

" Why so ? "

A note of a jarring laugh

" He avowed once to the meeting—and the folk
gave thanks for the humility past finding out in him—
that he aye felt the Enemy near him then Thomas
Weir by night is a worser man than Thomas Weir by
day ! "

The shudderings that shook Chrystal interrupted
the distraught sister's communications, but the
countryfolk whispered round the peats that night
that the White Lady of Coniston was abroad, so
ghostly were the cries of fever that pierced the
hawthorns growing about Hunter's Tryst The dark
was lurid with visions to the sick girl, she was thankful
for the morning with its twitter of birds and sweet
airs from the mountains The trot of familiar hoofs
rose out of the distance, sending Grizel into the hut
to prepare the morning meal Chrystal was thankful
to see her go, then the hoofs approaching came to
their journey's end, unnoticed by the girl until Major

Weir showed in the doorway. The sun was leaping up over the world's edge, and the sharp morning light seemed favourable to the figure entering, a surprise shocked through Chrystal's veins at a certain indefinable change in him. The secret man appeared to vary his mental colour with circumstance, chameleon-like, he adapted himself to surroundings, the mask, it might be, changing for the part, the real man behind never revealed for an instant.

Chrystal, groping in the next days after some such explanation, had need of all the strength of her girl-heart. Sometimes, lying with closed eyes to escape the intent black gaze levelled at her from under a hand screening it, the girl almost prayed that she might for no moment yield to a fascination felt to be put out against her. It seemed as though the man—casting aside all advantages of age or position—had suddenly opposed his man's nature to her woman's, to make good a claim, if it might be, to the submissive drop in the feminine blood. The duel, silent and fierce as that between the will-power of some benumbed wanderer and the deadly snow-sleep, renewed itself day by day, at times nothing but the remembrance of the key and the steadfast lie lied thereanent by Major Weir, blighted the germinating in Chrystal of the blind confidence which he was doing his utmost to beget in her. Chrystal had come to believe Grizel's warnings and disclosures the illusions of a lunatic, it came to her to set the enthusiasm of the prayer-assembly, and the sanctity which haloed the name of Weir in the West Bow, against a small obstinate doubt in the back of her mind, she weighted the scale further with some feminine fancy of an apocalypse sole for her of what went unguessed at by others, of a loneliness, a craving for sympathy in the soul of the man set apart by his very reputation from familiar intercourse with this world. Major Weir had brought her to regard the events of Montrose's execution as a regrettable but inevitable measure of party policy, he had instilled in her the art of scotching her judgment over many points, had made her almost

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ready to surrender the clear insight and pure instincts which had grown a torment to her, haunting her with the half-formulated perception of how bad Angelical Thomas must be, if in truth he were not good. Almost, yet not quite some intangible influence withheld the tide advancing, it would seem, with every hour, from attaining its flood. Major Weir, moving by hairs'-breadths towards conquest of the enthusiastic faith, which would have been marvellous convenient for more than one of his plans, never guessed that a dour desire to disoblige the Cavalier who had angered him by a couple of cutting speeches, had proved a weapon to foil himself where he had thought to succeed with ease, that had not Chrystal's own ears witnessed to his denial to Gordon of all knowledge concerning Montrose's commission, she would have found it impossible to cherish the faint prejudice warning her against succumbing mentally to Weir of the West Bow, by repute and profession—Saint!

The ebb and flow of success came to possess a singular interest for the man accustomed to conquest of minds, it occupied him to the exclusion of more important matters. In these days, the minister of Ormiston found opportunity to hold forth to those professional sermon-tasters of the Bowhead, whose ears it was a privilege to hold, and gained for himself a reputation henceforth not to be dwarfed even by Major Weir. The Bowhead remembered it afterwards as coincidence that the text on which the minister first preached had been—"Strip Aaron of the robe that is upon him."

Sin-scarlet poppies were aflame over the fields before Hunter's Tryst was deserted once more. The fitting, accomplished in the moonlight, entered Edinburgh with the dawn, an entry recalling Chrystal's first to her by a certain excitement seething beneath the staidness of the townsfolk, as well by the austerity which had, in the last day or so, reappeared in Major Weir's manner towards her, as if a failure experienced by him had made the sight of her distasteful, where before it had been no more than unsympathetic. His

silent presence, however, went with the women no farther than to the threshold of their dwelling-place. Weir plunged back then into the yeasty High Street with Come-carry-me trotting at Burd Ellen's rein. For a wistful moment Chrystal looked after her dumb friends from Clear Havens, befoie, greeted by the shadows, she moved after Grizel into the gloomy house.

Other eyes than hers fell on the horses with recognition. A youth—the blue and yellow of his French-fashioned *justaucorps*, his curls, the white feather in his laced hat, conspicuous to absurdity in the sobeily-clad crowd—started forward with a mincing oath, as Major Weir made sedate way through the throng. The exclamation, promptly rewarded by a box on the ear from a godly bystander, went unheeded by the horseman, the haffet however proving signal for a set on the unlucky fop.

“Drook him in the Nor’ Loch for a drinkin’, dicin’ gallant! Wi’ the paint o’s cheeks an’ the curly-wuilies o’s hair, he’s for a’ the warl’ like the marmouset idols ance set a-swimmin’ therein!”

“Waesucks! as the swallows wi’ the summer, sae he and his ilk wi’ the godless Stewarts!”

“Good friends, mishandle me not!” the lad entreated in falsetto. “I am fain of a word with one Major Weir whom I espied riding past but now—in sooth ye Scots could learn manners from the *canaille* of Paris!”

“Paris! quo’ he! ’Tis a popish spy! A French priest! A Fast-on-Fridays Jesuit! Major Weir would have nought but a rod for the fool’s back o’m, a’m thinkin’! To the Cross! The Quarryholes! Ding him forth o’ toun! A plot against the lords in their Ridin’! He’s blaw up the Parliament!”

A coach, heaving way through the mob, broke the crowd asunder. Wriggling and squirming, the little dandy seized the opportunity for escape, twisting from the hands upon him, he sprang on the coach-step, with a gesture of appeal to the lady whose laughing face appeared at the window.

"A queen's face suld gie grace!" he squeaked
"Madam, save me, I pray you, if it is but to come
by the natural end of all men who seeing you, die
for love of you!"

The woman, laughing still, had already signed
to her footmen, the youth hustled in by them enter-
ing the carriage on all undignified fours His rescuer
surveyed him amusedly

"Where got you that coat of many colours, Joseph?"
she demanded

"Not Joseph, madam, but simple Jock," the lad
corrected, scrambling to his feet "Jock Hope, a
name henceforth dear to me beyond all my havings,
if I can but hear it once from those ruby lips"

"Well, Simple Jock then, how came you by the
gay gear?" persisted the laughing lady

"By the rule-o'-thumb, loveliest," Dandy Jock
confessed, pulling out his yellow slashings "A
kinsman of mine, forced to fly the country with
small leavetakings, left doublets and trunk-hose to
moulder for want of wearing, so I, coming to fetch
a bride from Embro' town, made bold to help myself
to some few of the goodliest"

"Simple Jock, Simple Jock, ye are a wise man
of your size, to know the way to win a heart from
my sex," cried the lady merrily "Be she the fairest
or cruellest this side Prester John's coasts, there
must be a smile somewhere about her for those blues
and yellows!"

"For more than the blue and yellow, if it please
you sweet madamship," Dandy Jock simpered
"My lovely will not have set eyes on many men
who can make a leg or turn a sonnet after the Italian
manner, to match me, sithence she has abode with
my very good friend Major Weir"

"Major Weir!" The lady took him up sharply

CHAPTER XI

THE KING'S BUTTER

FOR a space there was silence in the cumbrous swaying coach. The woman in her rich decorous dress of blacks and whites, the lad wearing the loosely-fitting gay French clothes with the self-consciousness of the provincial, faced their own thoughts. Without, the crowd, recruiting from every close breaking north and south from the straightness of the High Street, fidgeted and fought towards vantage places for seeing the sight which it had come abroad to see.

"Major Weir? The bonny bride is in his keeping then?"

The coach had no more than passed under the pinnacled tower flanked by the peaked turrets of the Nether Bow Port, when the woman raised herself on the leathern cushions, turning her light blue eyes with the question on her companion.

Dandy Jock nodded.

"Major Weir is my very good friend, sweet madam. To whisper in those pink ears, made for hearing o' secrets, he is pledged to me that she will not continue in his keeping long."

"Pledged! Ay, twofold!"

Jean Gordon's boisterous laugh was checked by the standstill of the coach.

"Arrived! Plague on't!" she ejaculated. "Well, master bridegroom, if you will find the pretty bride you look for you had best come with me."

Throwing an emphasising beckon over her shoulder, she alighted, negligently sweeping her black and white over the filthy pavement in front of the Moray House. Dandy Jock followed with the swagger

of a half-scared self-assertion, shaping course for the hall through which his conductress was already rustling

A boom, reverberating as thunder, shook the crowd outside into a jangle of exclamations. The woman, her foot on the stairway, turned her mocking face

"Yon's your rival chapping at the door, sir bridegroom!" she cried

The boy had not found words to answer before she had passed from him, chuckling still as she ran up the stately flight. As though the cannot-shot had been a signal, the housefolk had broken into commotion, brushing past young Hope gaping in the hall-place, with no ceremony at all. His name, called by his perplexing hostess, came to him as a relief from his embarrassment

"Are kings as plenty with you as in a pock o' play-cards, that ye should lose the sight o' one, and he within pistol-range?" she demanded

Dandy Jock followed on her heels, to find himself among folk of condition. The dome-ceilinged room was full of ladies and gentlemen, of swords and fans, essences and laces told tales of the quality of their wearers, their prevailing sobriety or dress notwithstanding, but the stately females and dour-faced lairds were one and all as frankly at gaze as the jostling burghers on the street below the balcony projecting outwards on its stone brackets. Not a glance fell on the bedizened figure in its blue-and-yellow motley, who, snuggled into his protectress' skirts, fell a-gazing too

A rumble of drums had dominated the voices, the bystanders stood in silence, faces turned towards the Watergate. Trampling feet moved in order to the rolling beats, the sturdy provost's men clearing with their partisans a road for what should come thereafter

The pride of the pipes came first, singing and ringing with the music for which Scotland has always an echo, with sadness thrilling through gladness,

like the memory of past pangs present even in merry-making Pursuivants, next a squad of horses followed on, the riders making up in stateliness of bearing for the pomp of gold lace and gay velvets that Covenanting precision had shorn from the Riding of the Estates Edinburgh, Perth, Dundee, on they came, then the men wearing heralds' tabards,—Islay, Ross, Rothesay, Albany, Snowdon, Marchmont,—the Lord Lyon King-at-Arms bringing up the train A burnish of steel and glint of colour behind stole the eyes from the men who rode bareheaded in the falling rain Embroidered standards shook out the forbidden gayness over the assembly, defying Puritan scruples as they defied the leaden skies

“The King! The King! Long live Royal Charles!”

Lady Jean led the shout in her high clear voice, for the heart of the procession was level with the balcony Behind the splendour of the Life Guards, a young man in black and silver, riding a mettled grey horse a stride in front and rear of the rest, shook back his black curls in the sudden movement with which he looked up to the balcony For a second the plain attractive face broke out of its constraint, two pucks of roguery gleamed in the black eyes, that had expressed nothing but sullenness until they had rested on the woman waving the lace kerchief which her access of enthusiasm had plucked from her neck, the white bosom displayed to lavishness thereby

“Oh gemini! Yon's an eye that will give work to his father-confessor!”

Laughing immoderately, Lady Jean retreated incontinently from the balcony, dragging Jock with her The pageant was winding on Castlewards, saluted by the deep-chested belling of Muckle Meg, to do honour to the Stewart making entrance into his royal Embro', one of the few squares on which the Parliament might safely move their chess king The wine and comfits served for him at the Parliament House were being set out, as the figures in black and white and

blue and yellow flashed into the terrace-garden, gay with July flowers under the drizzling rain

"The ploy's by, but I have made my mark!"

The muttered words had the ring of congratulation as the woman drew her companion into a summer-house, the greyhounds of the Moray cresting its stonework. Dandy Jock's eyes rested admiringly on her satins, the frizzlings of her hair, the plump neck bared by its mistress' loyalty. That he should have found favour with so fine a dame was as a patent, confirming his own appreciation of himself.

"Well, Simple Jock, and when shall I dance at your wedding with this bide o' yours?" demanded Lady Jean, in an unstudied attitude on a stone bench.

Dandy Jock sighed dolorously.

"By that sweet face, the time may well seem longer to little Chrystal, demanding of night to bring the morning when her true knight shall come to her, than doth it to me," he avowed. "Madam, if it doth ever come to you to bewail yourself that you are a candle for the silly moths to be brent in, you will know to feel with me!"

The woman flung on the bench moved impatiently.

"The candle can be put out by a lackey, Simple Jock, and the same may chance to be done to yourself if you weary me with your prating of thumbed romance-books! Blow me not bubbles with your breath, but keep it to tell a straight story. Who is this bide, and how comes she with Major Weir, and what thread binds you and him together?"

"A bargain struck over my wedding of my kinswoman and his ward, Chrystal Hope," Dandy Jock made sulky confession.

Lady Jean sat upright. "What, the hop-o'-my-thumb chit with the face of a Bartlemy baby!" she cried. "Simple Jock, your chance of untying her snood for her is geyan small!"

"Not so small, madam," Jock protested affrontedly. "What for suld she have nought but a 'No' for handsome Esme, not to say for Sandy,—and Sandy

will go far yet,—if she has not a ‘Yes’ for a third lover?”

“Because maybe she’s waiting on the fourth,” retorted the woman. “And ye’ve seen the fourth riding up the street!”

She rose to clap him on the shoulder

“Come, I see I must hatch this match,” she cried. “You shall away to my lodging in the Kuk-Gate, and I’ll wager my finger-ring wi’ the great balas ruby, that the mistress o’ the courtings three will before long be next neighbours wi’ you!” She laughed, the full red lips drawing back to show the teeth. “Oh, ’twill be a jest, that the whey-faced miss seeking refuge in the hostelry of *the King’s Arms* against her wooers, should then and there fall to one of them!”

Bewildered, Dandy Jock yielded himself to circumstance, irresistible as the rain and wind beating against the sightseers still thronging the streets on the chance of seeing the young Stewart, whose name and titles of the kingdom which had betrayed his father had been rung out at the Cross. The day was dark over the picturesque domes and pinnacles of the Old Parliament, where the youth transplanted from the magnificent gaiety of the French court, sipped wine and ate comfits to the accompaniment of denunciations of himself and the blood in his veins from faithful-dealing ministers. The dark day under the noble oakbeams of the Parliament Hall, was not guilty of all the gloom on Charles the Second’s swarthy countenance, even in the early twilight of the West Bow, it was not guilty of the shadows on the sweet face of Chrystal of Clear Havens.

Chrystal had seen nothing of the Entry. Restless of the mysterious house, she had walked the day away in strayings from room to room, chafed by the consciousness of being once more in the town with the man of whom she thought all the more for having vowed to think no more of him. Weak still in her convalescence, she went to her sleeping-place with the jackdaws roosting in the high chimneys, before the Guest of the Parliament House had been installed in the quarters

allotted to him in the great Gothic mansion at Leith, she was asleep

The sleep was seared from her by the streaming of a light on her eyelids. Chrystal could not tell had the waking come early or late, as, cowering upright in the bed, her dazed eyes discovered the woman Grizel, the flame of the *cruskie* in her hand flashing on the gold rim of a medallion that appeared somehow familiar to the girl.

"By this token, ye are summoned to go forth with one who brings it!"

Chrystal had the recollection fast now. The medallion was that which the gladd-eyed gentleman in the Templars' House on the Grassmarket had shown her,—the face with the bold eyes and wanton lips was, he had said, the face of the only man in Scotland strong enough to save her from the kinsmen three pitted to her one. Yet she hesitated.

The flame in Grizel's hand streamed sideways as she made a movement doorwards. The girl in the bed watched fascinated the woman's eaves-dropping on a step on the stair, a brace of whispers that for a moment had thrilled the silence of the house. Then—

"The Judas-man is come and gone!" she whispered, stealing back to the bedside.

"As yourself told me in Hunter's Tryst, he had come and gone before!" Chrystal responded, listening to the footsteps, low in the Stinking Close, louder when they passed beyond the tunnel. Major Wen's charming through the days at Hunter's Tryst had not worked wholly, but it had influenced their object in a certain degree, making her half impatient of Grizel's crazed prejudices. The latter sank on her knees by the pillow.

"Brother Thomas has bidden me lay covers for four at supper the morn's night, and the Judas-man gined that if the lawyers kept him past the hour 'twould be no over concerting the witness that will bring Esmé to the gibbet, but anent the ante-nuptial contract with one whose name he snickered over,

but did not speak *By that Thomas gave him rendezvous at night, his coming bodes no good !* ”

“ Eh, woman ! why told you me not so much at the first ? ”

Chrystal was on her feet in haste that was passionate. Grizel’s last superstitious words had gone unheard by her, alliance between the red-haired man and her guardian appeared purely inexplicable, well-nigh preposterous to her, but more than one desperate expedient of her suitors had already taught the girl of Clear Havens that she could not afford to weigh probabilities. There was a chance that Sandy, Tod Sandy, might be on her track, there was a chance that she might outwit him. Hesitations had vanished.

A voice from without had reached Grizel, she left the room, to return instantly.

“ Brother Thomas is ill-pleased wi’ goings-forth from his house at an hour that little beseems a sober woman. If he has no rule over him that sends, quoth he, he bids you at least to go as ye were put on the morn he saw ye first ”

Chrystal, laying hold of her dule kirtle with its vasquine sleeves, felt surprise at the command fade with a moment’s reflection. The old woman’s disguise with the deep French hood would doubtless avert the scrutiny which a lass abroad at midnight might provoke from pragmatical watchmen or belated roisterers. Tod Sandy himself would pass such a one by with not even the alms of a glance. That Major Weir should not attempt to withstand a summons which must appear to him unseasonable, confirmed her intuition that it proceeded from the glaed-eyed gentleman to whom the captain of the Town Guard had spoken as to an official superior. That he whom she had heard named the Marquis of Argyle had laid stress on the secrecy in which her appeal was to be made, explained fully, to the child-innocence, the midnight tryst. Very swiftly she adjusted the garments ordained for her, the farthingale brodered with the great serpent in coloured stitcheries, the ruff and taffeta stammack, passing out even as she

put on the large-eaved hood, to the messenger waiting in the courtyard

The man, valet and Frenchman by appearance, led the way through the passage towards a chair stationed in the West Bow. The novelty of the conveyance occupied the girl's thought for the first moments, when she peeped through the leathern curtains into the darkness it was to find herself close upon a towered gateway, through which her bearers struck abruptly downhill to the left.

The growing sea-smell in the air drawing through the curtains came oddly to the girl of the moorland, strange cries and noises of washing water and creaking ropes after a while heightening curiosity. Bowats were few and far between, with straining eyes she had but just made out that a somewhat stately thoroughfare had asserted its stepped gables and timber-fronts over the fields and garden grounds of which the freshening wind had hinted, when the sedan wheeled into the mouth of an alley on the right hand, and halted before a low and narrow archway.

Chrystal, invited to alight by her conductor, found herself in an irregular court, scarcely more than a shrine for the projecting stairway that ran round two sides as a gallery, with quips of stonework breaking out here and there in oriels and brackets. On the fourth it announced itself as entrance to a square tower, towards which Chrystal felt herself steered by the valet's deferential hand at her elbow.

The tower, in the inside as the outside, was consistent in its profession of straitness. Chrystal, ushered up a winding stair into the simple cube of a bare chamber, thought her pilgrimage ended, but found her mistake. Her guide, opening an opposite door, stood back respectfully, waving her on into a corridor from which stairs and passages branched right and left, up and down into the space of a commodious mansion.

A gentleman, lounging on a cushioned window-dais, rose as the quaint little figure advanced from the tower-room. He burst into a light laugh

"Ha, La Jeunesse, you're a passable good smuggler!" he exclaimed "Welcome, Madame la Sage-femme, and remember 'tis *a girl* our Charles desires!"

"Your Grace of Buckingham has his Majesty's instructions," suggested the servant respectfully. The young man nodded.

"Ay, follow me, pretty pansy," he said, heedless of Chrystal's evident bewilderment. "Two faces under a hood, 'tis what we call pansies in England, and so Pansy shall be my name for you! Here, here's the cradle which that girl who's to be brought forth presently is to lie in, and I claim a kiss as entrance-money."

In a shrinking that Esmé's most reckless speech had never inspired, Chrystal pushed back the handsome face bending over her. With an instinct of seeking cover she flitted forward into the room they had paused beside, shutting the door fairly in the young nobleman's face.

Palpitating like a wild thing caged, she stood in the middle of an apartment of an extreme elegance, walls and ceiling fluted with ivory silk over-streamed with rosy light from a lamp swinging overhead in silver chains. Divans and couches were scattered about the Turkish carpet that stole the sound from a footfall, vases filled with flowers dispensed fragrance, one, full of a sheaf of white lilies, breathed narcotic odours beneath a portrait in which Chrystal recognised the face of the medallion. The freakish black eyes seemed to watch the girl in her vague misgivings, she fluttered through the scented chamber, back to—where the door had been! It was vanished.

Gazing at the unbroken flutings of the silk that was a prison-wall, Chrystal turned about with the consciousness of a presence in the chamber. Her start of surprise was answered by another from a woman on the threshold of a curtained alcove, the new-comer's eyes scanning, with the amazed amusement that Buckingham had shown, the quaint dress of the girl's disguise, before she stood aside to allow Chrystal to inspect the rest of her quarters.

A bed-chamber and dressing-closet of equal choiceness lay beyond, the sleeping-room affording a window, but no hint of a door. Morning, misty yet, revealed a gallant pleasaunce, its vistas of trees stretching from the house to considerable distance. Chrystal turned from the green solitude with uneasiness strengthened, resisting her attendant's efforts to remove even the disfiguring hood from her, though the Frenchwoman, as at last she guessed her to be, displayed with ardent signs dainty silks and laces which would have tempted at another time.

The day dragged on. Food, of a foreign flavouring was served twice or thrice, the salvers appearing in some mysterious fashion which Chrystal, drowsy with weakness and her midnight waking, could not detect. In the room luscious with the lilies she slept heavily at last through the noon-heats, rousing with a start to find the cool of the evening upon her, and the mystery of her captivity unbroken.

The woman, maid or jailor, had grown more urgent over a change of dress, and her solicitations germinated in the girl a faint hope that she was about to receive the summons for which Argyle had set her in her inexplicable situation. Through the day she had thought ceaselessly over the words the valet and Buckingham had spoken before her, she fitted to them the gladd-eyed gentleman's speeches on the balcony, and owned that the whole made a strange probability that the man who alone in all Scotland could be her aid was no one less than King Charles himself.

Bathing face and hands in sweet waters, but obstinately refusing borrowed plumes, she strayed through the outer room, keeping her glance from the intelligence in the black eyes of the portrait. Full-faced to an ebony cabinet, she fell to admiring the workmanship of it, the ivory limbs of its inlaid dance of Maenads gleaming ghostily in the faint ruby lamp-light.

Tracing the figures with outflying hair and tossed limbs, Chrystal seemed to see a life come to them.

Slowly, certainly, the procession of their going clove in two, the doors of the cabinet moving about to display a winding stair niched within. With no more than a hasty backward look, the prisoner was upon it, leaving with a fleet foot the perfumed captivity.

The stair, steep, was not long. Chrystal brushed through the half-opened door it led down to, and stopped short. For, as though the portrait had stepped from the wall of the room she had left, slipping past her in some winding of the stair, it stood to meet her in the chamber to which the secret flight had lured her.

"*Peste !* Is this the Parliament's notion of a pretty woman ?"

The words, uttered with a certain mocking discontent, came from the lips of the dark-complexioned youth whose solitude Chrystal had invaded. He advanced upon her, taking her hand with an easy familiarity.

"You have not the French no more than your tirewoman has the Scotch, and the toilet was bungled like the Tower of Babel for the same reason," he went on, coolly pushing back the great hood. The face, not made up for the part in the hurried midnight dressing, showed dangerously fair.

"Eyes and lips ! a good pawn for the rest of you !" the man voiced his appraising stare. "Come, *mademoiselle*, let's trip it up the winding stair to the parlour whence the wicked little spider descended to demolish the poor fly, weary enough, *ma foi*, of the web in which his ill-luck has led him ! Come, before now I have assisted at a lady's toilet, my cousin *Mademoiselle* herself has not disdained to consult my English taste on a question of jewels or ribands. Come, let's kiss and be friends. I protest yours is the first face I've seen since I landed from France that is not as long and spiteful as a sermon."

Chrystal's hand struggled in his.

"Your Majesty—if you Majesty be your Majesty"—she began in her bewilderment. The stranger laughed.

"Faith, sweetheart, I have doubted it myself this month! Church and King, it used to be our rallying-word, but, gadzooks! here in Scotland the Kirk, not content with stealing the King's head and taking his great K to itself, makes less than nothing of the rest of him! Never mind names, *ma me*, let us rather know each other by mark of mouth, your pretty lips won't go wrong there!"

Something that reminded of Esme in the reckless good-nature of the speaker emboldened Chrystal

"Eh, it's not now that a royal Stewart must be made known to his people!" she cried "With a Stewart in Scotland again, a Scotch girl need fear no wrong Sir, if I told you that, in place of being Chrystal of Clear Havens, I am a hare run down by the hounds, I should be speaking nought but truth, for Sandy the Tod, or Esmé Dare-the-Deil, or even Dandy Jock, will have their teeth in me yet if the huntsman in the Stewart tartans does not lay about him to drive them off!"

"Oddsfish, I've heard before now of a hard-pressed hare leaping into the bosom of some good old man," laughed the King "I'll be your goodman and welcome, pretty Puss, so never look longer before you leap"

With his hot breath on her face Chrystal shrank back into a corner from which a window looked out into the green pleasantness of the garden, but above a narrow laneway Following the girl's movement, Charles lounged to her side

"Even in the cage allotted to me by my jailors, I must not be without spies it would seem," he remarked, pointing discontentedly to the beetling house across the close with a casement that cried neighbours to the one in which they stood "Already in Stirling a minister of the Commission broke in on us, breathing out curses and burnt brandy, for no cause but that the devout hag in a window, as it might be yonder,—making her soul, I dare swear, because her face was past praying for,—had squinted at Buckingham and me shuffling the cards for lans-

quenet" His ill-humour vanished in a laugh "The burnt brandy had flavoured the godly man's sermon to rights 'If your Majesty needs for to work the works o' darkness,' quoth he, 'at least put a curtain to the window!'"

He straightened himself suddenly, impatiently

"Dieu des Dieux!" he burst out, "is this to be a king? Snibben, chidden, and ridden by all the cassock-men who seem to deem the giving of speech to Balaam's ass an Act of Apostolical Succession! Kept from my soldiery, thwarted, hector'd, harried from place to place by the Parliament, mewed here in Edinburgh, there in Stirling, while Cromwell and his veterans are marching and counter-marching without—what part's left for me? By—so much, if not a king, at least a man!"

The flush on his dark face lent an unholy glimmer to his eyes, pressing on Chrystal he hemmed her in, a satyr-like trait in his smile "And so, no man, sir!"

The slight creature, trembling, faced him, the steadiness of her look an instant's barrier. She made a break past him, baffled by the King with a sneering laugh

"What! you would make a scandal! 'Twere a tid-bit for the tabbies of the Bow over their chocolate, but they won't come so lightly by it! Bethink you, Middle the Prude, Buckingham and Wilmot in the ante-room, my good La Jeunesse sentinel in the corridor, an old woman seen to enter of her free will last night—what means remains to you to bring the household together?"

"Your next step shall teach you!"

The hot Hope blood was up in Chrystal, she had turned to desperate bay. Defiance, resolve, illumined her beauty, flushed into flame-like brilliance she stood fast

"By my soul, pretty kitling, you're worth a scratch!"

He was close upon her, mastering her in his arms. But the girl had one weapon left

Her girl's voice !

Through the open window it rang out, poignant, insistent, once and again before the King could stifle it. A hurried knock fell on the door-panels, sounds of feet running together pervaded the mansion.

At the opposing window a woman showed suddenly. Helped by someone unseen, she pushed a plank from her window, bridging the space between it and the one whence the pair, fallen apart, had not had time to move.

"For your King and for your honour !"

The words on a sharp half-breath reached Chrystal distinctly, through the surprise in which she recognised the madam of the Templars' balcony. Already, in spite of anger, the loyalty instinct in good blood pricked her to rescue the King from the scandal with which herself had threatened him, to break up the situation likely to do the Stewart Cause no good among the regnant Precision. With the household summoned by her own call mobbing pell-mell the ante-room door, Chrystal sprang to the window-sill, setting foot on the plank vibrating at nerve-trying height above the lane. The night-wind off the Forth rushed freely up the close, catching at the skirts of the light figure risking broken bones for a Stewart with the splendid recklessness of a Kate Bar-lass keeping the door for another of the blood. The brave little head held high from the danger of a downward glance, Chrystal made the hazardous passage, but as the woman at the opposing window threw herself forward to withdraw the plank scarcely freed by the pretty feet, the girl dropped in the faints on the floor of the chamber.

to the window Recollection of the dizzy passage over the narrow close seemed dreamlike to her, looking upon the stately prosperity of Leith Kirk-Gate as she launched a question at the lad beside her

“How come you and I here, Dandy?”

Dandy Jock simpered

“The fancy conceived for me by a woman of quality, is the bridge for both of us This is her lodging, the furnishings of Flanders and Italy, goodly as her fair self” He paused anxiously “She will be here anon, and it will behove you to make your compliment I fear you will perform but awkwardly, being little practised in Court ways at Clear Havens, but we will do our endeavour Look you, I will present the majesty of the dame, taking the floor thus with a gliding grace, while you—the right heel neighbouring the left toe—curtesy to the ground Bend gracefully, as I bend, throwing knees open to—foul fall it!”

Betrayed by the polished flooring, the blue and yellow overbalanced, rolled ignominiously The lesson on deportment was further interrupted by a voice—that of the woman who had taunted Montrose in Chrystal’s hearing—raised in an imperious summons, and obeyed in a haste by Dandy Jock

Chrystal welcomed her solitude The strange episode of her trepanment appeared inexplicable to her, thought desisted from it at last So much at least was clear, Major Weir could not be held responsible,—the conviction came as a positive relief to the hunted girl, with the gloomy house in the Bow for sole refuge Impulsively she rose She would back to it

A sweep of garments on the floor checked her movement The woman she had seen at the window stood within the doorway, her eyes scanning Chrystal with cold insolence

“What purpose had you in yon house, wench?”

“That of leaving it at the soonest possible, madam”

A flush leapt up the girl’s whiteness, her look met the

Unfriendliness in the widow's black and white with a cool dignity

The other made a mocking reverence.

"The King's Butter! Butter a thought rank!" she sneered "I am not a man, ye hempy, to be imposed on by your gloze o' virtue I know, none better, a light woman when I see her!"

"If you muslike the sight, madam, do not keek in the looking-glass!" retorted Chrystal Lady Jean took a step forward, her face distorted with spite

"Out o' my house, ye besom!" she hissed "Show your losel face again within five miles o' Edinburgh town, and I'll have ye set on the wooden horse at the Guardhouse, and scourged till the blood runs down for the words you cried to the traitor Grahame at his hanging" The pale blue eyes were venomous "Ay, yon's a charge my good uncle would little dare mell with! This once only I spare you, hizzy, so 'twill be your wisest to make a speedy flitting wi' the fool lover who has a mind for ye! Cross Jean Gordon's path again, and ye'll learn the fate she keeps for those of her hate!"

"'Tis scarce like to be as ill as what you keep for those of your love, madam, if that's biding wi' you!" returned Chrystal "Your goodman, it would seem, has chosen the better part!"

Evading the furious widow's response of lifted finger-nails, she flew from the room, headlong down the staircase on which it opened For once Dandy Jock was a welcome sight

"Eh, Dandy, let's away!" she cried, dragging at the gay sleeve "Yon madam will clapperclaw me properly for leave-taking, if we show her more than our heels another moment!"

A coach, second-best by the tarnished lace of the hammercloth and faded murrey cushions, stood at the house-door as Chrystal, urging her companion to speed, issued forth With an unexpected movement the youth half-lifted, half-hustled her within it, the coachman lashed his horses before the astonished girl had so much as taken breath for protest

"Dandy, Dandy Jock, what fool's trick's this?" Chrystal shrieked, with the coach swaying in a gallop

"A trick, cruel Diana, to cheat no less a one than Death himself!" Jock considered the coach-floor relatively to the blue-and-yellow hose, and went on his knees "For I must have turned murd'rer—of myself, my lovely, if I do not turn thief—of you!"

"Ye fell loon, sit up from your knees! Are you wud, Dandy?"

"Sweet Chrystal, 'tis time you should show your heart to me, though, by Cupid, I were no true lover if I had not read its blushing secret long syne!" Dandy Jock placed himself beside her, his falsetto rising above the clatter of the coach "Had I not been foully overmatched the day of your fitting to Edinburgh?"

"Ay, Jock, ye were overmatched, for ye fought wi' a man!"

The biting interruption pricked the boy's self-conceit

"It behoves you to keep a civil tongue, for ye're mastered, my mistress," he said sullenly "Sooth, as yon dainty dame has shown me, the wooing hath been overlong, I am no silly crow to sit squalling till the fox runs off wi' the cheese! With the wind fair for France, pretty cousin, you may be sure of a husband before to-morrow has run!"

The coach had fallen out of its gallop, working way through a concourse of people under some passing excitement of trepanning by a ship's crew. A thought seized on Chrystal

"Eh, good people, heard ye ever the like?"

The cracked old woman's outcry stirred the crowd at its edge round the coach. Sailors,—silver earrings glinting under ringleted hair,—fishwives of many petticoats, sober traders, gawpsying women, turned at the clamour, the ripple of sensation spreading from each to the neighbours beyond. The twilight had grown too thick for scrutiny of the face in its French hood bent from the window.

"An only son an' siccan a goodly ane, gentles,

an' a' for denying the minnie that bore him, so puffit up is he wi' the fine clothes the High Dutch doctor in Embro' High Street has put on him to play the fool in' "

The crowd, tickled by the wailing objurgations, closed about the horses' heads

"His nain mou' will condemn him, gentles' ! Speir till him, and hear the loon say and sweir I am no mother o' his' " cried Chrystal, heedless of Dandy Jock's gnashings of teeth

The doors, under a score of hands, were wrenched apart, the popinjay figure was dragged from its refuge in a salvo of angry splutterings

"Wow, man, 'tis the chiel who slithered on's breast down the tow abune the street, wi' the airms o' him spread oot like the wings o' a fowl' " cried one of the idlers "Weel marked I him, for three times over did he whiz o'er me, brisk as a callant across Duddingston Loch in ice, while the poticary was vending me a pock o' Anderson's Powders' "

"Tuts, Jock, hae ye made a gift o' yer een to the last gaberlunzie man ye met? " objected another "Yon lad is he who louped his ain length intil the air an' cam' down featly at ilka spring upo' the tow' I cudna be aff kennin' him, for I watched him the best part o' a daylight' "

"Ye curs' have ye no scent for a gentleman? There's one in a high place will gar ye pay a heavy toll for this violence' May I never wear lace more if every throat among you be not fitted wi' a St Johnstone's tippet' " squeaked Dandy Jock furiously

With the mob closing in for its horseplay, Chrystal saw her chance Evading from the opposite door, she mingled with the crowd, half of them come together they knew not for what

Working free of the throng, the girl found herself beside green water washing through the piles of a wooden pier and channeling a stretch of sandy flats with slow-creeping embassies from the sea beyond Farther out, gleams as of wandering fires reddened the dusk, the danger-lights of beacons built on jutting

tusks of rock or reef, ready to betray a tall ship with cargo of coal or salt, beating at unawares through the risky pilotage of Forth Firth

But Chrystal, as like to make shipwreck on ambushed danger as ever dainty-sailed frigate, had eyes for nothing but her way of escape. At hunted speed she flew along, turning short into a close with a promise of leading from the quayside and the crowd with Dandy Jock for kernel, as she dived into its shadow she came fair into the arms of a man

"*Morbleu* ! goodwife, your feet outrun your years !"

At the careless exclamation, Chrystal looked up quickly. In the baxter's yard near, a journeyman had fallen to heating his ovens with an armful of heather and whins from the stack piled up against the housefront, the red glow pulsed out over the face of the man whom she had left in anger upon the Burghmuir

"Comrade Chrystal !"

The words, greeting or challenge, leaped out like the flame flouting the darkness. A flash had leapt into the tawny eyes meeting the grey

"*Dame*, child ! it has been a long day from the morning on the Burghmuir to the night here by Leith Roads !"

Adam Gordon pushed back the French hood in friendly fashion, and smiled at the girl-face. To Chrystal's perceptions a certain familiarity had come to his manner, as though a friendship had burgeoned in the bleak waiting-time separation of the fleshly presence bringing about no divorce of souls mated by affinity

"Leith ! Am far from Edinburgh then !"

Chrystal looked in the face which for weeks had haunted wakings and sleepings to her, and forgot her anger and her vows against this man, forgot all save that they once more stood together—and one thing more. The wisdom of Mad Grizel was in Chrystal's mind. Voice was gay, lips would smile, but the girl meeting eyes tawny that were no longer

cold, but kind, spoke with the frank directness of the comrade he had named her

"Embroy! Are you for there the night?"

"Ay am I, and with a thankful heart, to know myself bound for the Bowhead instead of France wi' yon ne'er-do-weel cousin o' mine!"

"Your cousin? To-night first is to see him forth of the Tolbooth!" Gordon stopped short in the few steps he had taken with his companion. "Myself has been bargaining for two hours past with the ship-master who with him aboard will make a run for it the morn's morn. I chafed at the argle-bargaining, little guessing 'twas Dame Fortune's wrappage of the gift she has brought me!"

The masterful ring in his voice set Chrystal's heart to beating, but the wilful small hand he grasped at evaded his

"I am not cozening you, sir!" she cried gaily. "In sooth, I would I could say as much for myself, for troth! never was poor lass so be-cousined as I! When I took it ill of you going about to set Esmé free to run me down, little guessed I that Jock would have me wooed and married and off to France but for a French hood and a gift of play-acting!" Grey eyes were wicked under black lashes. "Eh, 'tis bonnier news for me than ever I deemed it like to be, that Esmé will be his own man again. Better marry a dare-the-deil like him, than a fool like Jock, or a knave like Tod Sandy!"

The man, shortening his strides to her pace, laughed satirically

"I see I need cudgel my brains no longer to get Hope shipped off, as he swears he will not go, wanting you! A husband! that's the main thing to a woman—fool, knave, or dare-devil! so the ring's on, fient cares she who puts it!"

"'Twould be well for my suitors, sir, if the knowledge you're glib wi' had so much as a smell o' truth in't!" retorted Chrystal with a great dignity. "This dress, worn to outwit the men who, two, three, and

four, were for putting the ring on me, would serve bravely for a fool's-cap for you ! ”

“ At least I have a pretty schoolmistress to learn me my lesson ! ” returned Gordon with reviving good-humour. Chrystal recurred to her feeling, rather than fancy, that some impalpable barrier had withdrawn itself from between her and the man walking at her side, for the first time their actual selves seemed in touch, as though two, inhabitants of neighbouring islands, hitherto only manifested to each other by friendly signals across a dividing water, should at last stand eye to eye upon some common shore.

The town was thickening on them before either of the pair stopped in their rapid walk. They were skirting the city-wall when an exclamation broke from Chrystal, at the dim sight of ruined houses and a deserted street. Gordon, guiding her steps through rubble-heaps, smiled.

“ The house divided against itself, falleth ! We’ve Scripture for it, and now that the Cropheads in England and Scotland have bared steel on each other, the Royalists may hope that the King and not the Parliament, will once again rule in Caledon ! These houses of St Mary’s Wynd and about us have been levelled by order of the Embro’ bailies, that the cannon mounted on the Nether Bow may bark defiance to Cromwell’s troops down at Musselburgh ”

“ Cromwell ? In Scotland ? ”

“ Ay, to give a master to the masterless Parliament ” Gordon spoke half to himself, his breath coming short with excitement. “ Cromwell or Charles ? The next weeks will show Scotland which ! Already the Stewart begins to chafe against those of the League and Covenant, the Parliament dare not trust him in camp with the soldiers who chalked *R* for *Rex* on their facings yesterday, in enthusiasm for the Stewart as he reviewed them on the Links of Leith. ’Tis the Royalists’ hour—but they must wait till it strikes ”

“ And it will strike—when ? ”

Gordon guided her aside, giving a quick peculiar knock at the door of a house on the wall

"When Argyle is cornered to crown Charles in 'cone!" he said "'Tis against the purpose of those in authority, you think, as it is against the purpose of those in authority that late wanderers like ourselves should enter the town otherwise than through the ports And yet one and the other can be done through a word!"

"A word?"

Gordon bent forward to the slightly opening door

"*Honours!*" he said very softly

The door, opening by a bobbin and a string, revealed nothing to Chrystal's eyes Her companion led her up an uneven stair into a plainly furnished room, and unlatching a door in the opposite wall, to her astonishment stepped out into a close, debouching upon the High Street, below the scaffoldings clinging about the half-built steeple of the Tron

"Forget as soon as may be the secret of the house on the Flodden-Wall," said Gordon, as the two passed up by the Cross topped by its quaint unicorn The imperious castle was lifting itself over the land it wardened, when Chrystal started and stopped The hand which had denied itself to Gordon in the beginning of their way, came with an appeal in it on his

"Pity o' me!" she whispered "Yon goes Sandy Hope!"

Drawing her with trained alertness into the shadow, Gordon looked keenly towards the figure a pace or two ahead in the widenings of the Lawnmarket The scattered lights, gambolling with the wind, seemed to make the night intenser, the man watched went slowly, peering from side to side as if in search of his landmarks Suddenly, with a glance over his shoulder, he doubled back on the pair

"Sir, of your goodness point a stranger to one Major Weir's 'land' in the West Bow I cannot hit the turn for this pestilent darkness!"

"'Tis a musket-shot ahead of you to the left,"

Gordon returned, eyeing the red-haired crafty face which sent the morning of his release from the Guard-house afresh across his memory. The other thanked him profusely and shot ahead, hugging his left

"It is he! Tod Sandy!"

Chrystal's voice, low and shaken, brought Gordon's eyes back from their following gaze. A strong arm came about the trembling girl.

"Ay, yon was the fellow who has laid Hope by the heels these six weeks past," he agreed. The Lady's Bell sent its curfew flying over the town as he spoke. Adam lifted his head, listening.

"What's to do now?" he muttered. "'Tis the hour agreed on for the breaking out, and I cannot leave you in open street, as little as I can leave the man who served me in the Tolbooth." He paused perplexedly. "Will you bestow yourself in my lodging in the Barras, and trust me to guard you as a true comrade?" he added, bending for a sight of the face, piteous-pale.

Chrystal shuddered in the strong arm.

"No, no, I dare not see again the half-born man! The thought gars me grue!" she declared. "And where but there would Esmé come when he was free? an' if you headed him off he might take an inkling of the truth." She paused in her turn. "The best chance is with Grizel," she concluded hurriedly, drawing her companion forward. "She will hide me in some corner till Sandy is gone about his business, I had clean forgot that he was for coming this night to the house where he takes me to be. Look you, sir, I will hide me in the Stinking Close, the black passage which leads to the Weir 'land,' and if it may be get word to Grizel as to her part of the matter."

Tod Sandy had crossed the court as the pair ambushed in the shadows of the passage-way. With no further ceremony than a particular rap or scratch on the panels of the house-door, he pushed it from the latch, and entered the hall beyond with the assuredness of the guest. For a moment a light

within showed the man setting foot upon the stair, but neither Gordon nor Chrystal had eyes for him. Behind them footsteps, those of a stranger by their cumbering, had entered from the Bow.

A man came up with the pair motionless in the shadow, he flung a French oath on the darkness. As the door of the Weir "land" swung again in its response to his summons, the watchers saw that the master of the house had opened to them.

Sliding a billet into the extended hand, the messenger turned about. The light, which for better seeing Major Weir held above his head, struck in an instant's flash across the face of the King's valet, La Jeunesse. Chrystal flattened herself against the wall of the tunnel as he repassed them, but the picking of his steps absorbed the Frenchman's faculties, he groped by unconcernedly.

The house-door swung to once more, as the flame in Major Weir's hand began to travel up the stair. It blotted out to the watchers the red-haired man, drawing back from his stealthy spying before the ascending light.

"You are late!" Major Weir saluted him drily.

"As I warned you I might well be. The town to me is barren of landmarks as the moor in snow."

Major Weir said no more, motioning his visitor towards the living-room with its usual brilliance of candle-shine. The lights dazzled eyes wonted for the last hour to the night, the supper-table, the grey-haired woman standing within the curious partition-line, were blurred to him.

"*What of the fourth, brother?*"

Grizel's question sounded harshly. The red-haired man could see now, he glanced around. The candle-shine left not a corner in suspicion, the three figures gathered about the table were alone.

"*What of the fourth, brother?*"

The woman, bending over the back of her carved chair, repeated it as she peered beyond the men. Major Weir sent a strange look at her.

"You see double!" he said shortly, touching

his forehead as he met Sandy's eyes Grizel gave her mocking laugh

"By net to catch, and balances to weigh the price of, souls, there's but the one ! He stands behind the Judas-man and casts, and has him in the meshes !"

As she spoke, the black staff fell clattering from Weir's hand She pointed at it

"It does its homage !" she whispered

Major Weir took a quick step forward, lifting up the staff with a threat in the movement

"Take your brainsick clavers hence, woman !" he commanded Before the uplifted staff Grizel cinged, and vanished through the doorway The Hope, watching the strange scene, nodded at his host as she disappeared

"She hath been distraught since her father's death," the latter made brief explanation The other chuckled significantly

"She fears the staff," he remarked

Weir smiled

"Ay, she fears the staff," he said, and invited his guest to be seated

The meal took its course in silence Once or twice Sandy looked about with an unsatisfied expression, meeting his host's eyes thereafter with a cunning look, but the men's plates showed the pattern, and the wine-flasks held only dregs before either spoke

"Is the humour on you to earn another puise the night, Master Weir ?"

The Hope, flushed somewhat with the heady Ozerè wine, asked it with the cunning look The question brought an ill-pleased set to the dark face opposite

"I'm for the Lammermuir wi' no more delays," Sandy added after a pause "A death wi'out a grave is waiting on Esmé, this weary town-tarrying has at least made sure of so much, but I'm for bringing the *wife* back wi' me, Major Weir !"

During the meal Major Weir had stepped twice or thrice to the window, putting back the curtain to look into the night, with a certain air of expectancy

He had moved to it again as Sandy spoke, and answered over his shoulder

"A set time was not in the bond!"

"Ready money is paid down for goods on hand," urged the other "When we made our bargain, I thought nothing less than two-three months should pass before I should call on you to fulfil your part"

The man at the casement stood silent, twisting the billet brought by La Jeunesse in his fingers Sandy, eyeing him narrowly, filled his tall drinking-glass again before he spoke

"Double or quits is the word between us, I take it," he said in his fawning voice "Double what you've had already from me, or the gold back in my pouch, Major Weir! 'Twould be a sore scandal for the Kirk Session that a godly elder should have conscience to take earnest-money for the lass his ward, as-if she had been a blackamoor!"

Whether Weir winced or not under the plain-speaking could not be read on his dark face He moved suddenly, swiftly, standing over the other in his chair

"Your gold will serve you better than your threats!" he said contemptuously "Think you that I am the man to be forced by you to a move which did not play my game?"

The low sardonic voice appeared to cow the Hope, a deep silence fell upon the room, till Thomas Weir spoke again in his usual level tone

"The maid Chrystal for a purpose of her own left us last night, and is not yet returned I have it from a sure hand that she is not at the one house where, save this, could she be, and by my order she will be stopped by the Waiters at the ports of the town should she be passing in or out—charged as a night-wanderer, and afforded a *night's lodging in the Guardhouse!*"

"The Guardhouse! Eh, man, 'twould be putting the lass in perdition!"

A flash of mockery glimmered in Angelical Thomas' eyes at the startled protest

"Then, 'tis for you to play angel and bring her freedom at daybreak, by demanding *her forth as your wife*," he returned unconcernedly "No fear that in her unsavoury quarters, with a word or so passed before her anent the chastisement the Kantore affords suspected light madams, that she will not let pass the word spoken *before witnesses*!"

Sandy laughed loudly, as if to cover his momentary qualm. In the sudden riot the sound of the house-door turning very softly was not heard.

"'Tis but the road to the honourable estate of matrimony," he snickered. "Short-cuts are mostly rough going, but the lass will bear us no grudge if we keep a still sough as to how she came by her goodman!"

"I will but get my cloak, and be with you in the instant," the other responded, apparently as unconcerned with his merriment as with his scruples.

As he left the room, Sandy slid noiselessly from his seat. Where Weir had stood in the window, the billet, dropped in his sudden motion of anger at the Hope's attempted threat, showed white on the floor. The few lines of writing lacked a name at beginning or end—

The Butter is more apt to blister the Paws it was assigned to than to bind them! It is no doubt fitted for honest housewifery, but in another purpose it has failed, since in the first hour it was exposed to heat, it ran! Rid your household of it lest it should melt in the mouth

The Hope, drawing his red bristling brows over the enigmatic writing, had barely time to slip it into his pouch before Major Weir re-entered.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WAITING GRAVE

THE house-door creaked upon its hinges

Against the faint light of the background, the man and girl in the tunnel saw the figure of Grizel Weir stand out on the threshold, an appeal in the face and hands which she raised towards the night-sky. Chrystal put Gordon imperatively back, flitting herself, finger on lip, across the courtyard.

"Grizel!" she said very softly

The woman accepted her presence without surprise

"The staff beckoned at me!" she murmured

"The day it touches, it will take me—to our own place! When brother Thomas and I fared forth to the coeven at Dalkeith, yon was the sign given to me, as Angelical Thomas received the promise to be kept in life and death from all ill save that happening to him through *a certain burn*!"

The last words, falling heavily from the muttering lips, sent a remembrance aflash through Chrystal of a similar hoarse murmur from Major Weir in his seizure in the parlour of Clear Havens, but her need was too pressing for irrelevant thought. She took Grizel's hand with a warning in her pressure.

"Whisht, and listen!" she whispered. "You must hide me—hide me from Sandy Hope!"

"The red-haired man?" He *and another* are holding council with brother Thomas, the two speaking the thoughts that the third gives them!"

"You must hide me!" Chrystal repeated insistently. "If not here, then elsewhere." She laid her cheek against the weird woman's. "Grizel!" she adjured, "for your father's sake!"

The other straightened herself, drawing Chrystal farther into the shadow of the housefront

"Bide here till I hearken to the thought that's been given to them!" she whispered, turning back into the house

With steps light as snowflakes, the girl had crossed the courtyard before Grizel could have mounted half the stair

"Comrade, your feet need itch no longer to be away from me! Off with you!" she murmured, with a laugh in her hushed voice. The next moment, she had given back a step. In the twilight, the tall form of Adam Gordon was close, his hands had come on hers, crushing the soft small ones in his clasp

"I am not a hawk to be cast off at pleasure!" His tone lost nothing of command for its cautious pitch. "Pay me wages before I go"

"Wages! Between comrades?"

Chrystal felt his breath on her cheek

"A kiss for luck then! Comrades should treat each other as themselves"

A breath of a laugh answered him first

"Ay, sir, but I never kiss myself!" Chrystal parried demure. The hands on hers tightened

"Kiss me then!"

"What will Esmé in the Tolbooth say to this delay?"

The double-edged reproach moved him to no repentance. The attitude of camaraderie, with its frank grantings, its impalpable withholdings, seemed to have whetted masculine desire, touch, voice, eyes were aglow with a man's ardour, sending imperious electric summons through the woman's resistance.

"That kiss!"

A leak of light from the house they watched told of the door's reopening. Chrystal's hands fluttered birdlike

"Eh, sir, if Sandy finds me!"

"He'll find more than he looked for!" retorted Gordon, his peculiar flashing smile charming his face out of its lines of melancholy. The two faces,

so close together in the twilight, moved nearer yet, the lips which that day had been forbidden fruit for a king, felt in the twilight a man's kiss firm upon them "Farewell to comrades!"

The words sent Chrystal's heart down from its upheaping. The man whose kiss, whose grasp were still warm on her, had passed into the dusk, Grizel's nervous fingers were clutching the next moment at her hand.

"Brother Thomas is weaving where I span," she muttered, "but his shuttle is the Judas-man! Forth wi' me, if ye would not be caught in the web they weave!"

Fevered by the whisper, Chrystal followed blindly, though the woman hurrying through the tunnel into the Bow did not give a second for explanation. Voices of passers-by climbing from the Grassmarket seemed to determine her course in the opposite direction. The Old Weighhouse with its double outside stair, and the steeple-crowned archway emptied by the night of butter and cheese hucksters, had long been left behind in the perspective of the Lawnmarket, and in front of the women drifting glints of moonlight were casting fragments of shadow upon the stone ribs and spire of the tower of St Giles, where racing clouds, like a troop of wild huntsmen, showed in an endless pursuit through the open-work of its lantern. Grizel swerved from the gloomy prison-house opposing itself over against the great church, as Law to Gospel, and hurrying her charge through a passage break-neck in the darkness, relaxed at last her hunted speed.

"I hearkened at the door, and heard them plotting over the buying and selling o' ye!" she whispered. "Eh, lass, Thomas has sealed the ports o' the town to ye, and there's no hiding in the house lest *the staff* should hunt you down, but if your heart's strong enough, the dead shall do what the living cannot,—and that's save ye from the red-haired man!"

She drew Chrystal on, talking still in the breathless whisper.

"If you dare, say I, you may hide where brother Thomas will not dream of seeking, where ye will foil the black staff itself, for its might would wane before *the blessing on the ground*!"

The moon, triumphing fleetingly through the clouds, shone out on her pause. The cold light laid bare to the girl a place of graves,—headstones upright or fallen, vaults scattered here and there, mounds revealing nothing of the sleepers within, a caravanserai of tued wayfarers waiting for the Morning.

Chrystal recoiled

"Eh, 'tis a kirkyard!" Woman, what means it?"

Grizel chuckled

"Liever the kirk than the kirkyard!" she cried mockingly. "The kirk that sees your wedding wi' the Judas-man the morn!"

The moon had yielded to the clouds again, and the women were alone with the wind and the night. Grizel's laugh came bleakly on Chrystal's ears.

"Riddle my riddle!" Who goes a-hunting without stirring e'er a shank, and catches his prey by sitting still?"

Chrystal started from the crazed woman's side, lifting her eyes to the racing clouds in an agonised quest for day, the day which should find Adam Gordon free from his self-imposed task of breaking the Tolbooth, free to turn to championship of another hard-bested comrade. But the night showed no wane, its weird must be dreed first, alone.

"Riddle my riddle!" Grizel had pursued her. "Where is it that to hide and to run both lead to death?"

Her grasp tightened on Chrystal's arm.

"Nay, then, if ye won't crack my nut, I'll crack it myself!" she whispered. "Baudrons at the mousehole and Mousie at home is just a parable of Angelical Thomas and you in Embro' town this night!"

She moved, drawing the girl down the sloping ground.

"*The Guardhouse* is the lodging he's appointed for ye this night !

"This is the wage, black as a shame, red as heart's blood, a paying the grudge bred in his soul by the whim of the lass brought to the town to serve the will of Angelical Thomas !"

she chanted in a curdling monotone "*The Guardhouse* is the lodging he's appointed for ye, and the one way open to ye to come forth o't wi' good fame will be as *the wife* of the red-haired man !"

Chrystal's cry was smothered by the nervous hand

"A danger kent is crippled !" Grizel muttered "The Judas-man is in haste, 'tis why he will do his endeavour to make his own of ye to-night But it there's gold to be lost by resting in the town, the town will soon have seen the last o' him Ye must hide—and bide, till I bring ye word that his back is turned on Edinburgh !"

"Ay, I must hide to-night !"

The terror chill on Chrystal was passing, as the night about her was passing towards the light Like the tempest-tossed sailor seeing, by the form of the waves that buffet him, a hint of land approaching, so the girl in her peril was conscious of her hope The whisper with which she turned to Grizel had no tremor

"Quick, bring me to this ark of yours !"

"'Tis here, beside us !"

The moon, looking through a wind-rent in a cloud, showed the woman's hand pointing to a vault of stone a pace or two to the left A fat growth of weeds grew up about it, ivy had rooted in the crevices of its stonework, a young ash-tree drew Chrystal's eyes like a beckoning finger to a door beneath it, ajar in eerie expectancy

"'Tis the grave-place of the House o' Traquair," Grizel at her ear was muttering "The last o' the line played *the King* in the game o' Beggar-my-Neighbour set between the King's men and the Parliament, and lost house and lands and a' save this burying-place o's forebears The gate stands

aye ajee for him to enter, what time the streets—that once saw him pranking it through them in his state—sees the last o’ him and the beggarman’s pock he carries for the broken meats which he begs from door to door’ But the yett’s no shut yet, so in with ye behind it, the Judas-man and Angelical Thomas and *the black staff* will think long before they look for ye there!”

Trampling fears underfoot, Chrystal moved forward to the refuge imposed on her by a crazed woman’s will. The drifting moonlight had passed, and knee-high nettles venomously stung the hands groping through their grey growth to clear a pathway to the door, open for a man still lingering in the warmth of the world. Chrystal shook, and her lips were white and set, but she turned only for a long passionate look at the windy night before she slipped through the opening and crouched within the charnel-house.

Her life concentrated itself in listening. Grizel’s steps hurrying back to the house where her absence might breed suspicion were already faint, but there were other sounds. The wind had tricks. A shriek, poignant to ghostliness, swept by the girl, it had almost hounded her forth through that open door before she knew it for a blast whistling through some knothole or orifice. In its silences, the noise of an eldritch knocking held her ears, throbbings, thought she, of the hammers of the world driving nails into the coffins of the waiting dead. A duller sound seemed like the beating of a hand against a coffin in which the living, not the dead, had been hurried from the sunlight.

Her eyes, growing used to the darkness, saw the mummy-shapes about her, piled, thrown rather, on each other to the roofstone. One near had rotted open, a bone hung over the side, as in life the round white arm clothing it might have drooped over a lover’s shoulder. Chrystal felt her skin dampen with the moments. An earthy smell sickened her, the mouldering bones seemed to taint the clammy air. Thoughts of the deaths those bones had died, started

awake in her, visions of bleeding wounds, putrid fevers, flitted past in the darkness, she felt at last under her own arms for the swelling of the plague, roosted, it might be, in one of those coffins, like some foul vampire issuing thence even now to fasten on the sound flesh and blood daring its hideous neighbourhood. Yet these miasmatic fancies yielded before the horror that made prey of her when at a rustle she turned in the greating light to see two rats slide from the broken coffin, squeaking in shrill battle as they rushed over her skirts. Fear of the uncanny things rallied her. She stumbled to her feet, to recognise, with a great chord of thankfulness vibrating within her, that tardy day had come.

Moving weakly for her tremblings, Chrystal crept through the doorcrack. The morning air, dank from mountain and sea, dizzied like wine after the hours spent in the closeness of the vault, on knees and hands among the nettles she lay still till she might gather strength for the way to the Barras. Her peril from the cousin she hated as much as feared had wiped out repugnance to the weird Italians, memory of Gordon's face, ardent as she had seen it last night, gave good promise to her hope of a protector.

A voice, unmistakable in spite of an attempted softening, broke, not five paces away, on the other side of the vault.

"The shipmaster sails with the morn, does he? Good luck to him with the anker of mountain-dew he'll be for smuggling, but he'll not smuggle me!"

"Is it 'Ho' for the Tolbooth,' so soon again, then?"

Gordon's tone, sharp with displeasure, rallied Chrystal's senses in the presence of her most reckless kinsman.

"No, it's Ho' for Love and it's Hey for Hate!" retorted Esmé quickly. "What, a drowning hog swims for his life though he cuts his own throat thereby, and you must take me for less than a hog if you think that care for my throat has kept me these weeks

past from splitting my jailor's head with his own keys, to save me from rotting longer in the prison ! ” The voice sank from its gay carelessness “ Hope blood is no brose to cool by waiting, man ! I was in love with little Chrystal the night I won into the Tolbooth, but I'm in hate with Tod Sandy the night I've won out—and the last will do more than the first ! ”

“ 'Twill hang or coffin you no doubt,” returned Gordon with impatience Esmé stood still, the length of a sword-thrust from Chrystal, down among the nettles

“ 'Twill do more than that, brother,” he said in a low tone “ 'Twill thwart me Sandy for all his cunning, 'twill carry off the wife he schemed for an' the coupling minister were great Satan himself ! And this to be done before I leave Edinburgh at my back ! ”

To the ears strained among the nettles, came the stamp of Gordon's heel upon the ground

“ A pox on this folly ! Here have I put—not my neck, for a Gordon's not wont to count that in his reckoning—but my business in Scotland in the scales with a comrade's safety, and here it is to do from the beginning ! ” To Chrystal's fancy he stumbled something over the word *comrade*, the vexation in his tone seemed too personal to be altogether concerned with the risk another's stiff-neckedness might forge for himself

Esmé laughed noisily

“ You've done as much as honour demands, brother ! ” he cried “ Wash your hands of me and of my love and of my hate, and do you be jogging ! ”

A sudden resolution seemed to ring in the voice answering

“ Wash my hands of you ! We could spare soap there, since what I did for you is no more than tit for your tat But oons, man, when it comes to your love and your hate, the soap's needed ! For in truth, I hardly know if your love and your hate are not mine as well ! ”

Oh, the silence that would surely play traitor to the beating of the heart in the girlish side! Through the riot of her pulses, the involuntary eavesdropper lost the words that broke Esmé's pause at last

"In looking at grey eyes and a pair of sweet lips, I have lost sight of the comrade of whom I told you on the night of the tulzie" Adam was speaking now "To be comrades with such, 'tis either too much or too little Too much, if a man would keep heart-whole with true eyes and sweet lips beside him, too little, if his heart has stolen a march on him! But," the bitter ring was back in the voice, "before now eyes and lips have fooled a man, and I have no mind that two women should boast of having done as much for Gordon of Brackley! So, till the errand that calls me out of Edinburgh town is done, *if* must be the word with me"

"And you think 'twill be for me too?" Esmé interrupted "That I'll hing off and on till you've tasted if the smack's to your mind or no?" He sent an oath jarring through the grave-place "If and if and if!" he jeered "If ye want the lass, stay and fight for her, that's my word to ye, for and if your errand were to shave Hornie himself, ye must choose between it and Chrystal!"

"That choice were to make Chrystal's choice worthless" Gordon's answer had tairied and was spoken slowly "My honour's in it, man, and the grey eyes I spoke of would have little but scorn for me, did I bring that diaggle-tailed to my lady's feet!"

"Keep your honour, then, for troth! I'll know how to keep Chrystal!" flashed Esmé "'Twas honour, I dare swear, has kept us prating in this wet kirkyard-kail, while you made known that we should pull caps for a sweetheart, but unless you've a fancy for coming *honourably* by one of these graves, we must be working our hinderlands on whatever business they may take us on! I for Sandy and you from Embro!"—

"And back again!" The grey light glinted on

something in Gordon's hand, he had pulled forward one of the tawny lovelocks falling on his shoulders, shearing an inch or so from its length with the dagger he had drawn "Back again before this curl has grown to its fellows," he finished, with his sudden brilliant smile

"In time to shake a leg at my wedding, then!" Esmé responded

"My hair grows quicker than that," returned the other coolly "Meanwhile I can trust you to keep the bride that's to be—for somebody—from fox or fool, as I can trust that which I've left with the bride's self to make her keep herself from you—till the memory wears out But my hair grows fast!"

Esmé swore unreservedly

"So you think that I'm to tackle Jock and Sandy to leave the road clear for you to come courting in!" he said "Perhaps, an your hair sprouts as fast as you say, 'twill be long enough for you to hang yourself in when you come back to find the bride fitted with a bridegroom!"

Gordon smiled

"A woman's memory will need to be shorter than I've cut the hair, if I'm to find that! And I take the risk!"

"Give me your neve, man!" Esmé interpolated, checking his onward movement "If there's a fight to come off between us, there was friendship first, and rot me if I don't like you well and would strike in with a lusty goodwill on your side, against the devil the world and the flesh—bar so much of the three as stick in my own hide! So good-bye and good luck to you, and your hair—and your teeth, for troth! you'll need to grow them if you're to take Chrystal from me, and it's to be with us as the song says—

'That he sall take who has the power,
And he sall keep who can!'"

"My teeth are grown!"

The quiet answer was lost in the Hope's careless whistling as he swaggered in the direction of the

Cowgate Chrystal ventured to peep round the corner of the vault. The next instant she had cowered closer. Her glance had shown her Adam Gordon, his face with a singular look of stress upon it, sideways towards her.

"Chrystal! Chrystal!" he said aloud, and very suddenly. "Little Chrystal, since I must go forth and leave you, give me back my heart!"

With the words he had gone, before the innocent spy down among the nettles could gather courage to disclose herself. It had grown light, a faint twilight, like the hope of the Resurrection, had come to brood over the coffins and the moulder, as Chrystal crouched once more in the vault to reckon with her world.

For the world had turned from dark to day once more. The kiss which she still felt tingling on her lips no longer seemed to her a farewell, not even a pledge of a protector, it was rather a seal, a sacrament inspiring her to keep herself for one who had claimed her. Chrystal set her teeth, as she reflected that now it behoved to baffle Sandy Hope, not merely as an unwelcome wooer, but as a pretender to what another man had won, a foretaste of the wife's loyalty came to reinforce her inbred aversion to him. Sandy had presumed more subtly, more daringly than ever reckless Esmé, with continued thought the situation focussed increasingly in her imagination upon the red-haired man. Chrystal left aside the question of Major Weir's part in the business, though, now instinctively seeing with Gordon's eyes, she could not be sure that one who had lied once might not lie twice, that in the days of Hunter's Tryst he had not sought to juggle her, as he had sought to juggle Gordon himself in the matter of the key. The moment, however, was not one for calm retrospection and analysis, but for action, and in all broad Scotland one path of action alone seemed to promise the harassed girl a chance to rid herself of the dangerous kinsman.

Chrystal rose to her feet, shaking the dust of the

vault and of her wanderings from her skirts. The hands raised to bind the gold hair afresh were steady, she had taken her resolution.

Quietly, with light feet, she descended the slope of the kirkyard, where Esmé had gone before. The bustlings of the Cowgate were about her before the swift steps slackened, a thought of what Grizel had told her of a watch set on the town-ports coming in a warning to her mind. The sight of second-hand clothing displayed on a booth appeared to end her indecisions. The tripping girl in charge—lightening the dulness of selling by shrill badinage with the pretence of the cordiner recently emigrated from the Shoemakers' Lands in Forrester's Wynd—had no ill-convenient scrutiny for the decent wife buying a kittle and cloak for some lass at home, though if the master and not the man had been on duty at the shoeshop over the way, the appearance of a stranger on one of the days on which municipal statute enacted leather footgear could be sold to other than citizens, might have aroused professional interest. Chrystal ventured further to buy a twopenny *fadge*,—its lawful weight attested by the stamp of the baxter's irons on it,—and a *choppin* of milk from the milkmaid with the wooden buckets of her trade slung from the yoke across her shoulders, but with the hasty meal completed, she stood in an instant's reflection. Her glance roved questioningly over the towering houses of the Cowgate with quaintly legended doorways and projecting wooden balconies, it grew wistful with its turn to the Barras on the west, but when she moved it was to face for the lanes climbing to the Canongate.

In spite of various betrayals by confusing wynds, she went rapidly, curving to avoid the Nether Bow and yet to come out below the Cross. After some beating to and fro, she emerged successfully, much on the spot where on the previous night she had stepped out with Gordon into the High Street, but the easier half of her task had only then been accomplished. With keen wits alert for the house on the

wall, she quested, but vainly, into many a courtyard and through many a close falling short of the promise held out by it to her hopes. She had made the circuit of the Tron Kirk for the second time, when with a gleam of a smile lighting the gravity of eyes and mouth, she swerved into a lane-way, deserted but for a couple of urchins at bools, and after no more than a single look about knocked unhesitatingly at one of its houses.

The door opening with inhospitable delay was held against her entrance by a man apparently well-disposed to close it in her face. His eyes were questions, hostilely conceived.

"I came through this house by another door last night, and would fain go back the same way," Chrystal said, directly but softly.

"You dreamed last night," retorted the man. "But dreams aye go by contraries, and your dream goes to prove that there's but one entrance here, to admit friends by and to turn strangers from."

"Friends will soon be to seek by ye, if yon's the way you do the honours!" snapped Chrystal, nettled. The door, narrowing as she spoke, paused perceptibly.

"There's a key for every lock, kimmer!" the man responded, after an instant's hesitation. Chrystal pressed nearer.

"Turn it then quickly, good fellow, for it's a long road to Leith."

As if a sesame had been unknowingly pronounced by her, the door opened, the janitor leading way through the room which the girl recognised. As he made for the stairhead she stopped.

"Secret for secret!" A woman as well as a house can have two faces, but both woman and house need have but one story to show to the world, that knows no more than it sees! Do you say nought of what went out at your door, and I'll say as little of what door I went out by!"

"See nought, say nought!" returned the man gruffly. "Folk that have the tongue to speak the password may wear what face they like for a' me!"

Chrystal, unlacing her bundle on his retreating footsteps, wondered passingly over his speech, but the business of adjusting her new garments distracted her. With nimble fingers she transformed herself, ordering the gold curls of her hair and imparting her peculiar grace to the homely dress, till, with a sigh for a mirror, she had done her utmost. Cloak about head and face, she hastened downstairs, pulling the bobbin and admitting herself out in the straight road of Leith Wynd.

Tripping daintily to avoid soiling her buckled shoes, she made way onwards, divining her landmarks with that sixth sense possessed by some humans and most animals. Rapidly, till a vision of stately streets struck her with a recognition, her breath came in flying pants at sight of a large mansion imposing with the ogee arch of its doorway, filled in with traceries that, in the luxuriance of its Gothic, contrasted with the severity of its square lintel and the lion's head engraved on it. Shields with crowned ciphers and heraldic devices pranked on either side, but their pomp went unread by the girl, stopping before the wide stone stairway that ran up to the many-windowed building.

The check was but momentary. Drawing the plaid closer round the face from which the brave blood had been driven only to gather stronger about the heart, Chrystal made way across the courtyard and moved straight on the entrance. The upright dignity of the figure, or the whiteness of the hand holding the muffler, sent a civility through the lackeys and horseboys, engaged in a strife of tongues, Scotch, French, English, through the vestibule.

"One of you, of your goodness, send La Jeunesse to me! I would have speech of him."

The tone of command, natural to the little mistress of Clear Havens, rang with a soft imperiousness through the hall. Behind the plaid, blushes were flying now, but the muffler was loyal to the secrets it screened, and the self-control of good blood kept Chrystal's voice steady. The tartan screen, which

had held its own against civic edicts weighted with pains and penalties divers for purse or person of offending wearers, might equally shelter the woman of quality or the servant lass, but a messenger was sent hot-foot for La Jeunesse, and his visitor ushered with bows and without demur into a parlour

The breeding which had imposed upon the lackeys did not miss its effect upon the quick-witted Frenchman, sliding into the room amid supple bends. Taking courage from the jealous plaid, Chrystal spoke

"I have to do with the King! Can he be spoken with?"

The King's favourite valet eyed the plaid sharply. The girl as she stood before him did not flinch in the quiet grace of her bearing, but to eyes watching, the hand clasping the tartan shook somewhat. The valet bowed more profoundly

"Madame, I will make call his Grace of Buckingham"—

"Stay, sir!" Chrystal had taken a step forward, sweeping his Grace of Buckingham from the question with an admirable gesture. Decidedly the woman of quality was behind the muffler. "My business is for the King's ear."

"His Grace of Buckingham, madame, has his Majesty's ear!"

"His Majesty has two ears, sir! No need to trespass on the Duke of Buckingham," responded Chrystal quickly. "And his Majesty has a tongue, to make known his displeasure to a bungling servant!"

The slight well-poised insolence of carriage perceptibly impressed La Jeunesse. His bow bettered the others in depth.

"Madame, I will inquire if 'tis his Majesty's pleasure to receive madame."

Chrystal took another step forward.

"No need for formal announcement," she returned coolly. "The stair in the cabinet will serve my turn."

The valet straightened himself, daunting an odd look at her.

CHAPTER XIV

THE WOMAN OF THE WINDOW

"If madame knows so much, his Majesty belike knows madame well enough to dispense with ceremony," he said at last, moving towards an inner doorway. "And his Grace of Buckingham would have been inconvenient, as a father-confessor when the supper-table is set *à deux*."

"Keep your wits, sir, for your fellows!" The lips which Gordon had kissed, flung the haughty rebuke, but Chrystal, pale behind the plaid, followed nevertheless unswervingly. The valet glanced askance at her, and fell silent, leading way from room to room.

"His Majesty keeps his cabinet, madame!"

The servant had pushed a door before them slightly ajar, he fell back beside her with the whisper. The girl's steady steps stopped, she saw through the opening the negligent figure of the King, lounging beside the window through which a few hours before she had fled from him.

His back turned towards the doorway, Charles was unconscious of her presence. The black curls pushed aside from a heated, eager face, he was absorbed over the placing of a looking-glass, one of those fixed in scores of windows in every Dutch street. Shifting and counter-shifting its angles, the King pursued his occupation, till a quick laugh of satisfaction escaped him. In the mirror a room had dawned, by essence-flasks, the scarlet ribbon for rubbing colour into pretty cheeks, the litter of dainty garments, that of the woman lying on a couch within it, one rounded arm flung above a head of frizzled hair.

At sight of the figure in its negligée, arranged to reveal rather than to conceal, Chrystal drew a sharp breath. The King turned, the mischief in his eyes deepening as he perceived his unexpected visitor.

"Oddsfish! my prison betters the Garden of Eden by a pretty woman, for here are two of them!" he exclaimed. "What, *mignonne*, after all you have less fear of taking a false step than it seemed last night, since here you are back again to visit me! The hunted hare, as I see, has but taken a ring from her form the better to confuse the scent!"

The innuendo in his tones stung, but her purpose claimed Chrystal. She sank on her knees, seizing the King's hand in hers.

"Sir, I have no fear of making a false step in coming to my King!" she said quickly. "'Twas to save him I fled from the man yesterday, and 'tis to save myself I come to the King to-day!"

The sweet gravity of her words, the shining of her look shook Charles' mood. He stood silent. Chrystal went on more passionately—

"Sir, you asked yesterday what is it to be a king? It is, to show your kingdom that there is a man's heart in the king, and a king's heart in the man!"

"Double, double, toil and trouble!" hummed the King provokingly. "'Tis a witch's song, my love, and the Precision has taught me to eschew witches, apt as they are to transform simple souls into different creatures. So, come, from your knee to mine, pretty one, and let us forget the King for a while!"

"The King must not forget himself," retorted Chrystal. "Sir, you spoke yesterday of the Parliament, think you not that they are doing that very thing—forgetting the King!"

The good-natured, careless smile vanished from the Stewart's face. He stood moody, his glance turned alike from the woman in the mirror and the girl still on her knees.

"An it's true, what would you have me do?" he muttered.

"Make them remember him!" Chrystal sprang

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up, confronting him with deepening eyes "Assert your will—yourself—from this day out!"

"Assert my will—in the hour I choose to play at the golf—in the colour of the comfits served at my table!" The King's laugh had a bitterness in it.

"A matter as trifling will do to begin with!" Chrystal spoke with straitened breath "Put to the horn my kinsman, Sandy Hope!"

Charles laughed again more freely

"*Lettres de cachet* are a fashion Scotland has still to learn, *mignon* Were we in Paris, Cousin Sandy could be popped into the Bastille or out of France in the scraping of a pen, but here in Scotland the King is the only innocent fellow 'tis lawful to imprison!"

The light tone seemed to ring deafeningly in Chrystal's ears. The room had grown misty, the ground heaved and swayed under her feet. With the disappointment of her girlishly conceived purpose, strength forsook her, but for the King's start forward she would have swooned upon the floor.

Snowdrop-pure, the unconscious face showed upon his Majesty's shoulder, the sunshine making a glory of the curling gold hair. Holding the fainting girl in his arms, Charles glanced about him uncertainly.

"*Peste!*" he muttered, "she looks as they told me little Bess did when she made a fitting of it in her sleep from prison to Paradise! What's to do now? For them to find her here will be for her to lose her good name. Buckingham would vow I had turned Puritan, yet somehow the child must go as she came—in all innocence!"

The air from the open window blew revivingly on Chrystal's temples, mingling, to her waking senses, with the perfumes of various essences wet on hair and face. Hands, kindly if awkward, were on hers, chafing them.

"Oddsfish, she's stiffer in coming to herself than she was about coming to me!"

The King's petulant exclamation unclosed the sealed eyes with an apprehension in them. At sight

of the swarthy face bending over her, she tried to raise herself from the cushions of the window-seat, but Charles gently pressed her back

"*Dame*, child, if the Prince, of D'Aulnoy's fairy-tale, roused his *Belle Dormante* with a kiss, it must needs have been a smacking one! Nay, lie still yet a bit, trust me, I have not copied his methods!"

He turned to pour some wine into a drinking-cup

"Your lips must be red again before they can tell me aught," he declared with familiar kindness, holding the cup to her mouth "And I would fain know what Cousin Sandy has done that you should be for banishing him from bonny Scotland"

"Eh, sir, 'tis what he will do, and that's marry me!" Chrystal faltered "As long as he is in Scotland, so long am I in peril from him, and, sir, I had liefer wed hangman Cockburn than Sandy Hope!"

The whimsical smile flickered in the black eyes regarding her

"Does the choice lie between the two, *mignonne*?"

"Not by two more, sir! But I can keep Esmé and Jock to their distance if I am helped wi' Sandy"

"I protest you are more difficult to match than a lady's patterns!" cried the King "But when the lady is hard to please there's apt to be a man in the case for whom she will look her best, and I will wager my wig there's a man too in this to be looked for?"

A traitorous blush flashed over Chrystal's whiteness Charles laughed good-humouredly

"I thought as much when you took flight yesterday Love flies out of the window from poverty, they say, but here I've seen her do it before a bogle which would scare other women less! Well, pretty one, and what's the name of the happy man?"

"Please your Majesty, he does not know he's happy yet," said Chrystal through the hands hiding fierce blushes The Stewart's mischievous smile deepened

"Oddsfish, Cousin Sandy must be kept from spoiling this romance!" he cried "A *lettre de cachet*

would be marvellous handy, but we must try another device" He paused, twisting his black curls in his fingers "*Ciel!* I'll turn playwright if all else fails!" he finished, flinging himself with boyish carelessness on the cushions where Chrystal still sat "There's a germ of a comedy as good as any Ben Jonson ever fathered, sprouting in me! How would it be if Cousin Spoilsport were made bearer of despatches to France or Spain, or the Cham of Tartary if you will, with as much treasonable matter in 'em, that a hint dropped to the Parliament would ensure my messenger being laid by the heels for a space?"

Within the Dutch mirror the woman had risen, creeping with stealthy bowed body towards the window facing that where the two absorbed in each other sat, their backs turned to the would-be eavesdropper Jean Gordon's hard handsome face scarcely showed above the window-sill as she crouched beneath, the light blue eyes gleaming venomously with recognition of the graceful gold head opposite, so nearly touching the black curled one

"It will be to save me, sir!"

Chrystal's clear-carrying voice floated on the summer air without, the woman within the mirror set teeth viciously on her full red lip Listening, listening still, she knelt

With characteristic absorption in the whim of the moment, Charles had forgotten her existence His words, broken by mischievous laughter, escaped the spy's ears, but Chrystal's answer came to them

"Sooth, I know not that, sir, but word of him may be had at my Major Weir's in the West Bow"

The woman at the window clenched a passionate hand The King—the black curled head bent—was writing on his tablets, what Jean Gordon would have given gold to see

The sun, conquering a rebellious cloud, struck a sudden brightness out of the crystal of the spy-glass, struck, too, a gleam in the watching eyes The figure in the mirror moved swiftly to her toilet, to

return instantly with a handglass set in silver wrought-work of leaves and flowers.

A hand in her eagerness on the writer's shoulder, Chrystal was dictating his writing of a name, a name that from its reflection in the larger glass was thrown legibly into that held by Lady Jean. With a smile of satisfaction she read it—*Alexander Hope*.

"Another jog to the Bow for La Jeunesse," observed Charles, putting up the tablets. "My Lord Lorn—who seems more minded to make his game by playing *the King* than doth his father,—him with the eyes which may well have grown crooked through a trick of keeping one of them on the things of heaven and t'other on those of earth,—sent him there last night to see if he could learn from your Major Weir had the pretty pigeon homed?"

A tremor which Chrystal could not repress stole over her at the name.

"The spiriting of Sandy out of the road will be good riddance to Major Weir as to me," she remarked. "Sandy is sly enough to have gotten some kind of a hold on him—the godliest name in the West Bow!" She spoke as though she would lay her own misgivings with her own words. "His very godliness it is that may well have blinded him to the cunning that lurks under the Tod's red hair, it takes a deil to ken a deil!"

"A good name is by times a domino sufficient long to hide the cloven hoof, and Satan's one for keeping the best foot foremost!" retorted the King drily. "Are you so sure that this Major Weir is the goose to Cousin Sandy's fox, and not, as somewhat I've heard would hunt, that you and Cousin Sandy, and belike me myself, are not pieces in the worthy Covenanter's own game?"

"Ay am I, by token that my Lord Argyle charged me to keep the coming to speech with your Majesty secret from him," returned Chrystal confidently. "And to say truth, Major Weir was not for my going forth with your messenger."

Charles shrugged his shoulders

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"You may be in the right," he said "Certes, saints are seldom corned with good sense, and the wings of angel or goose may be already sprouting on your Major Weir, who lets one of his household run the town without so much as a why, when, and where? Yet, and if only that an excellent goose makes a poor yard-dog, might it not be well for you to shift quarters till the fox, if he's your danger, is fairly hunted out of the country-side? To go where Cousin Sandy could not find you might be a move worth the making"

Chrystal shook her head "That, your Majesty, might be to go where someone else could not find me," she faltered with a pretty embarrassment, picking up the plaid she had shed in the moment of her entrance The King gave his debonnair laugh

"You would not wager that there's not a hair of the fox in me?" he said "Take your own way then, if you will, lassie, and care of yourself if you can, and I'll be leal bargain-fellow."

A sudden alarm widened Chrystal's eyes as they fell on the mirror, recollection of which had been wiped out in her since her swoon She glanced apprehensively at the neighbouring casement

"She who houses there is no friend to me," she said abruptly

"I'll wad as much," Charles returned "The pretty woman in her looking-glass is apt to be the only one a pretty woman has a liking for"

Chrystal bridled

"Keep me from her liking and her misliking together!" Pretty woman she may be, but good woman she's not!"

The King stretched

"That I'll wad too! Female virtue, like time on a clock-dial, is apt to be read clearest on a plain face," he said in his ordinary cynical manner, angering Chrystal to a scornful silence Charles sounded his gold whistle

"The plaidie well about you, *mignonne*, that the wisdom of palaces may not guess you the ex-

ception to the rule," he supplemented his last words kindly, as a knock heralded the answer to his summons

Chrystal hardly heard his advice. The energy which had strung her for the interview was flagging now that success was hers, nervous apprehension spurred her to set face for the West Bow. Scarcely waiting her gracious dismissal, she submitted herself to La Jeunesse's guidance, chiefly conscious of an eagerness to be free of the palace precincts, to rest somewhere in silence and shadows from the adventure which had sorely taxed her fragile strength.

The postern by which she had been first brought to the Balmerino House opposed her restless speed, La Jeunesse fumbled at the lock. Secretly impatient of the delay, Chrystal pushed the muffler slightly from the flushed face, to which the summer wind came refreshingly. The valet's boggling had been but momentary, the door in his hand swung wide, disclosing him and his companion to the glance of a man passing at the instant, wrapped in a cloak.

"Well met, Madonna Fair-face! *Ohé, Lazare*, pull up those shambling legs of thine, that we may make our reverence to madonna, whose prayers doubtless have more than outweighed the gold that she promised for the poor service we were able to render her!"

The black eyes of the demi-man of the Barras were fixed on Chrystal's face, sending a nausea of repugnance over her. Only half-conscious of her actions, she clutched at the valet's arm, dragging him back, as she threw the postern-gate into the lock between herself and the weird brothers.

An ugly smile glimmered in Gian Battista's eyes. "*Ohmè*, madonna is proud!" he said sullenly, gazing at the closed door. "Too proud to sully her white fingers with paying poor men their price."

"She is but a child, Gian Battista," remonstrated Lazare. "The sight of you, little brother, has scared children before now. And the signor who was with her paid us a good price for the bit of craftsmanship he asked of me."

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"Madonna could bear the sight of me when we could serve her," retorted the other. Lazare glanced at him, obviously apprehensive.

"We must not linger here, Gian Battista," said he. "Great ladies are not to be kept waiting. She will pay well for the trinkets of her fancy," he added, moving on at his peculiar heavy pace, "and some day madonna will pay too."

Gian Battista laughed thinly.

"'Tis God's truth, Lazare! Some day madonna will pay!'"

A sigh of relief came from Lazare's lips at finding his twin unexpectedly placable. That Gian Battista was not always so, scars on Génois' brown skin attested, there were days when the uncanny brother, not content with wrecking delicate designs or valuable tools, sated temporary irritation on Lazare through teeth and nails. Involuntarily the latter quickened his steps, that the gold of the client who would pay might effectually divert Gian Battista's mind from the client who had not, a few steps brought them to a postern opposite to the one behind which Chrystal had vanished.

That other opened a moment after the Italians had passed into the house which had given them rendezvous. Chrystal had speedily grown ashamed of her nervous shrinking, the recollection of her forgotten debt braced her to confront her creditors with no more poltroon delays. As La Jeunesse, at her sign, unclosed the door he had shut two minutes before, she stepped swiftly through it, to find the alley deserted.

For a couple of indecisive moments she stood still, looking up and down its length, then with an involuntary relief that she was not called on again to face the repulsive spectacle, she turned to the valet. The man who had cut his hair with a vow of speeding back to her in Edinburgh town would carry the promised reward to the house in the Barras. Chrystal blushed as she had not blushed for the King's words and ways, at the thought that neither the Génois nor herself would have long to wait.

valet led, had crafty looks for all things in his road. His small greenish eyes slid everywhere, but the narrow face betrayed nothing of the messages flashed by them to the brain beneath the red hair. La Jeunesse inwardly wondered at his impassiveness before the two had reached their bourne, the stately old house that had been advanced to the dignity of King's Lodging.

Traversing corridors and anterooms with shrewd glances for carved furniture and sound-stealing carpetings, the Borderman stood at length on the threshold of the cabinet where Chrystal had already stood before him. La Jeunesse drew aside the curtain and signed to him to enter, but the peering eyes marked the depth of the servant's bow, his own conge imitated it as he advanced to the two young men lounging in the window-seat.

"Your name and business, friend?" demanded one of them.

"Troth, I'se leave that to wiser heads than mine to ken," returned the red-haired man. "My business here is to find out my business here, a'm jalousin'."

"Your name then? Is that to be found out too?"

"No, sir, for I'm thinkin' ye ken it as weel's myself, or I would not have the honour o' hearing your lordship spear it," responded the Hope. His questioner laughed, twisting the curls of his hair.

"Well disengaged, man! Come, supposing I tell you your name is Sandy Hope, what have you to say to that?"

"That ye ken mair about me than my name," rejoined the Hope, but civilly.

"I protest, George, he has parts!" drawled the King, amusedly. "What more do I know about you, friend?"

"That I can serve your Majesty somehow and somewhere," Tod Sandy answered deliberately.

"What, you have your share of knowledge, it would seem?" Charles commented. "Yours I dare swear, has been picked up in the streets, where quick

wits may glean a thing or two at times But how came I by mine, think you ? ”

The red-haired man came nearer the window-seat

“ The reason is no just *crystal-clear*,” he said at a venture

“ Few things are in this witches’ chaldron of a world, my friend,” returned the King The foxy-faced man could not be sure whether or no a careless stretch had covered a start, but Charles was leaning forward with the fascinating Stewart smile “ And yet there is one thing clear enough for one of my blood to see in yours,—the loyalty of a Scotchman to a Stewart ”

A grimace from Buckingham commented on this admirable sentiment, but Sandy winced his body almost to the floor

“ Let your Majesty try it ! ” he cried, and it was possible that for the moment he was sincere

“ Try it or *buy* it, did you say, good fellow ? ” inquired Buckingham, rising to his feet “ The words ring something alike in a Scotch mouth ”

He avoided the King’s furtive vigorous kick, and strolled from the room Sandy straightened himself sullenly Behind the King, now conning some papers in a packet he had drawn from his doublet, a woman framed in the opposite window made a swift warning signal to the red-haired man

“ The Stewart, not the King, asks for loyalty, friend ” Charles had raised his head and was speaking gravely “ Is the loyalty strong enough to risk something for the Stewart,—who may never be King enough to requite you ? ”

A lute thrummed in the ante-room throbbed through his pause Buckingham’s voice, fitting a popular couplet to a French air, came sharply to the men within—

“ *Trantor Scot
Sold his King for a goat,* ”

trolled the voice idly Frowning the frown of black level brows, Charles held out the packet

“ Get that to Paris, and call Charles Stewart your

debtor," he said, watching with half-shut curious eyes the impassive face before him. In the window at his back, the woman, finger on lip, signed imperatively to the same impassive face. *Take it! take it!* was the message of her attitude.

The impassive face was impassive still as the Hope took the packet from the King's hand. Charles rose, drawing a ring from his finger.

"A prisoner has not many means of rewarding his friends," he said, giving it to Sandy with the same pathos of simplicity. "La Jeunesse will look to it that the monies for your journey are provided, he has traffick with shipspeople here at Leith, and will see to your passage."

At his whistle, the valet had appeared, deferential, in the doorway. The Hope, backing awkwardly, flashed a stealthy look at the opposite window. The woman still stood there, she lifted a white arm in a beckoning movement, twice.

The Borderer spied sharply down the alley's length, as he emerged from the postern. The expectancy in his attitude was answered by a hand, white and plump, signing from a half-closed door a yard or so distant.

Walking warily, Tod Sandy accepted the dumb invitation. With his passing through the wicket, it shut behind him, the lady of the window confronted him.

"Well met, Sandy Hope!" she said laconically.

"Ye seem better acquaint wi' me than I wi' you, madam," rejoined the Hope. The woman laughed jarringly.

"I know more than that of you, Sandy!" she said. "I know how ye're all for a sweetheart who flouts ye, and how Esmé and Jock would rival ye, but what I do not know is"—

She broke off, to turn with an imperious gesture to the house opening on the courtyard in which they stood. Silently the man followed, up stairs and through passages to a handsome saloon, looking out upon the Kirk-Gate. The lady, throwing herself

full-length on a couch, surveyed him with shallow blue eyes

"What I do not know is," she said, "the price you were paid for the King's Butter!"

At the slowly spoken words Sandy started visibly, his hand moving to a side-pocket. Jean Gordon broke into her shrill laughter.

"Eh, it's there, is it?" she cried. "Man, it bude to burst out the seams if, as Solomon says, the price of a woman is above rubies!"

The Hope stole his furtive glance at her.

"You are pleased to be pleasant, madam!"

"Not half as pleasant as you, Sandy!" Lady Jean retorted. "Were I in the trows, I could never put a good face on lending my sweetheart to another man—and were he King, Bashaw, and Grand Turk in one—and taking her off his hands with a grace when she's a thought the worse for wear!"

A sullen suspicion crept into the man's eyes.

"Your ladyship has been fooled," he said tentatively. "My sweetheart is little like to have fallen in your road, your waiting-woman has seasoned a dish of gossip with a lie or two."

The bait of incredulity took.

"Why, fool yourself!" Jean Gordon cried. "Have I not seen the hizzy with these eyes in the King's own cabinet? Did the baggage, no later than last even, not rescue herself from discovery in this very room? Was not the besom this morning plotting with her lover there, to get you—you—you out of their road," she laughed vibrantly, "stuffed with false despatches as an egg with meat? Go down to Leith Roads the morn's morn, man, and see if Parliament has not received advices that will have garred them tryst you there with a file of soldiers bearing irons for a love-token!"

"How are you so sure o' what ye say?" Alexander Hope demanded insinuatingly.

The woman sprang from the couch, dragging him by the sleeve into an adjoining room. As they crossed the threshold, the rattle of dice and men's

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laughter attracted the Hope's stealthy look through the open window

"God's thunder! George," the Stewart's voice continued a conversation, "you have the luck of a first gaming! *Peste!* you don't deserve it, after so scurvily causing me near-hand lose my bet that I would make yon Cousin Sandy nose-of-wax for us in the first five minutes! Sonties! the Parliament will do justice for once if they wring his neck for him, the fellow's face is judge and jury enough to bring him in guilty of smashing all the ten commandments, as completely as ever Moses did"

"May I be whipt if I don't deem his face the best part of him," drawled another voice "At least 'tis not as false as the rest of him, for it gives out plainly the treacherous cur he is!"

The King, drinking and dicing with Buckingham in the oriel beyond, laughed as he spoke. A hand, stretched from the window, might have reached him across the narrow laneway

"How much that goes on in yonder room, think you, escapes eyes that watch as mine do?"

Lady Jean plucked him back as she hissed the question through shut teeth. The curtain, falling from her hand, blotted out the players silhouetted against the light

"One thing, madam. The lass' innocence!"

The Hope's answer brought an ominous glitter to the hard blue eyes

"Innocence!" she fltered "Bonny innocence, who seeks the King's room by night and plays him as a cat a mouse with the game of Off and On! My Lady Innocence, back again on the nest she was for quitting ere the nest had time to grow cold! coaxing and cajoling his Majesty to make a fool o' ye, Sandy, my man!" The impassiveness of her hearer heated her, she bent so close that her scented breath stirred the red hair "It will be to save me, quo' the jade, and then I knew there was a rod somewhere in pickle that would make my dainty fine madam wince and start, and I set myself to bring

it on her I spied on their writing of your name in his tablets, I hearkened to him and his boon-fellow Buckingham composing the feigned despatch that ye bear about ye, and the message whilk yon graceless Villiers pledged himself should seem to leak out to the Parliament' I knelt on my knees for a long hour, ay, and I would have knelt them raw, till I saw the lackey returning with you, whom he had been instructed no' to return without' " The hushed voice rose again janglingly, "Is the lass so innocent indeed, man? Trow! 'tis innocence fit to be throned in the Sinner's Seat! "

"I'll no' say that the maid may not have been brought to the King as ye declare,—myself made sure of so much but now, hearing him sae gleg and glib wi's 'Sandy Hopes,'—but I have that in my pouch, madam, to prove what I say "

The Borderman's fawning voice crept through the voluble spitefulness She fetched breath sharply His eyes on hers, his hand travelled again to the side-pocket, to let a paper appear between his fingers "Lorn's writing!" she cried involuntarily

Not a flicker of Tod Sandy's weather-wizened eyelids told that a piece had been supplied to the puzzle putting together in his brain The insinuating voice sounded evenly through the room—

"The Butter is more apt to blister the Paws it was assigned to, than to bind them! It is no doubt fitted for honest housewifery, but in another purpose it has failed, since in the first hour it was exposed to heat, it ran! Rid your household of it lest it should melt in the mouth "

With her shrill sneering laugh, Lady Jean had recovered herself

"Tuts, man," she cried, "your proof goes limping! What does it prove but that he who penned it"—her slip of the tongue had gone unnoticed by her—"was fooled himself by Lady Innocence! Major Weir will think twice before he gets such another Goff the play-actress to build his fortunes for him, I promise you! "

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A heat had come to the Borderman's face, mottling its sallowness with broken red. The suspicion in his eyes had grown into a smouldering resentment.

"'Tis to Major Weir as weel's myself that my Lord Lorn will have to answer if wrong has been done my kinswoman," he said, with undisguised fierceness. "She is his ward, promised by him for my wife"—

"Your wife, Sandy? As Jock's widow then! Haith! it only wants Esme to receive the bonny bride from Master Weir's hands to make the Comedy of the Bargain complete."

The woman's riotous cachinnations redoubled as she perceived that her interruption had struck the words from the Hope's lips.

"How much did he make of ye, Sandy man?" she shrieked in her hoyden way. "Jock gave him diamonds, but I'll warrant that ye'd make a better hand at a bargain than Simple Jock. And Master Weir could afford to let his pretty bale of goods go on easy terms, seeing he was drawing good pay from my uncle—

'He was paid for the foal he never lost,
And three times o'er for the good grey mare!'"

she sang out audaciously. "Eh, Sandy, Tod Sandy, your sojourn in Embro' should go down in the calendar as the Feast of Fools wi' yourself as patron saint! You've been fooled by the King, Tod, and fooled by Master Weir, and fooled, fooled, fooled by the slip of a girl whose innocence you were red-hot but now to champion!"

Her laughter, its merriment a trifle forced, vibrated through the lofty room, dying slowly away at last in the face of the Hope's dead silence. The hand, fumbling still at the side-pocket, drew out a handkerchief.

"A knot in a man's pocket-napkin whiles puts him in remembrance." No trace of anger was in the silky voice speaking at last. Alexander Hope seemed absorbed in the handkerchief he was knotting.

at the corners "So—this for the King," he went on, "and here for Major Weir, and the third for Chrystal my cousin Troth, I'll wad they'll find Sandy winna forget"

"And the fourth corner left for him for whom Madonna Fair-face has fooled you and your Master Weir and all the world," added an unexpected voice

CHAPTER XV

THE LOCK FOR THE KEY

JEAN sprang in a catlike bound at the curtains veiling one of the lofty windows, and plucked them back

At sight of the amazing apparition of the two-headed figure on the raised window-da's—Lazare Genois, in apparent reluctance of the interruption, fidgeting with the mosaic necklace under repair, Gian Battista's black eyes sparkling evilly as he turned them from face to face—the Hope staggered back with a curse. The woman, her breast surging in its pants, challenged the Italian's eyes

"What mean you, Master Eavesdropper?" she demanded

"Gian Battista, excellency, and no eavesdropper" The dem.-man gave back her look. 'The excellency knows that the poor brothers are too fond to brook even an hour's separation, the excellency herself placed Lazare here with tools in the casement, since good light was needed for the mending of her chain"

"I asked explanation, not excuse, from you, knave!"

"Gian Battista means nought, excellency," Lazare interrupted feverishly "'Tis a humour on him, at times causing him to rave he knows not of what. How could the poor Italian, afflicted of God as he is, know aught of the excellency's acquaintance, of what I swear I know nothing!"

"Lazare, a lie badly told carries its own condemnation!" retorted Gian Battista coolly. "Thy stupidity has forgotten belike the cast that lies at home, the cast of the key by which madonna was to cheat her Major Weir"

"A key? What key, fellow?"

"A key to lock nothing but Madonna Fair-face's secret, excellency, for the signor with her gave no pattern for aught but a certain size, and the handle to be wrought into the letters *B* and *O*"

"O and B! A second key, wrought by you!" Lady Jean darted on Génois, shaking him by the shoulder

"Speak truth, man!" she cried violently "The thumbikins and the boot will instil it into ye if ye treat me to lying! Tell me what is this of a key!"

"The excellency shall know all, but for her patience it were better to hear it from me than from that ass-eared Lazare," interpolated Gian Battista, evidently alarmed at Lazare's obstinate silence "Madonna Fair-face"—

"Fool, whom mean you?" Jean emphasised the question with a stamp of her foot

Gian Battista eyed her steadily

"I mean her who came forth of the King's Lodging as we entered to the excellency," he returned quietly "The same pretty lady had weeks ago taken sanctuary with us at the Barras, so hard pressed was she by one Signor Esmé Hope"

"Is the fourth corner for him, friend?" the red-haired man broke his silence

"Not if the signor has a mind to match it with a knot binding up his quarrel with Madonna Fair-face," responded the demi-man drily "For by madonna's looks—and eyes are more apt to carry truth in them than tongues—the Signor Gordon of Brackley is the one for whom the fourth corner must be kept"

In the eagerness with which the Hope was listening, he failed to see the whitening with which Jean Gordon started back, her hands lifted to the rich lace at her bosom, as though to rend it apart for a free breath

"Gordon of Brackley!" she cried harshly "What part does he take in the ploy?"

"That of the hero who wins the hearts, excellency," Gian Battista replied "To pleasure him, madonna swore to do what she shuddered at, the stealing of

a certain key from Major Weir, and the cheating him with one which Lazare was to make after the signor's directions "Lazare," he glanced at the brother listening sullenly at the disclosures he was powerless to stem, "is less sharp in the ears and wits than I, but I hearkened to much of their discourse as we stood, forgot, or unnoted, by them on a well-curb "

"This Gordon? Where is he now? You wrought the key for him?"

"Of a truth, excellency, and that evening. But it was not till yesterday that the signor went forth, and is not yet come back. He lodges above us, excellency, and the floor is a thought rotten."

"Ay, man, and words come through that rotten floor?" Tod Sandy ignored the woman's impatience and asked it cunningly.

Gian Battista pointed to the various morsels of coloured mosaics on the jeweller's table.

"Fragments, signor, fragments, like those Lazare is fitting together on that golden background," he said meaningly.

"The golden background shall not be wanting here, man." A yellow crown-piece glittered in Sandy's fingers. "What fragments have you to put to it?"

The black eyes were covetous.

"Not once or twice signori—some like himself with curls and laces, others wearing falling bands and sad coats like masquerade habits—have come to visit him. They have talked 'of a pledge to ensure good faith from the Parliament—means to force the Squinter's hand—and the play which would call in the King.' But of late the fragments have been of another nature."

Gian Battista's pause was big with intelligence. A second crown peeped from the Hope's hand.

"Of late, signor, the words have been of *Alyth* and *London*. And 'tis not two days since one came in much disorder to the Cavaliere Gordon and spake long with him, but of what we could hear nought,

save that as he went the signor bade him look for speedy news from Dunnottar ! ”

“ *Dunnottar* ! ” The woman at Sandy’s side struck her hands together

“ Back wi’ ye ! ” she cried She caught the gold from the Hope, and thrust it into Lazare’s unwilling palm “ Back wi’ ye to your quarters, and within the hour that yon Gordon sets foot again upon the rotten floor, be here with the tidings ! ”

With an impetuous sweep of the white hands, the table in front of the Italians was dashed to the floor, trinkets and mosaics rolling in all directions Lady Jean checked G  nois’ movement to gather them up

“ Leave your havings, and go, fellow ! ” she commanded

Under the imperious voice and eyes, Lazare moved doorwards The bovine placidity had passed from his face, a rigidity had come to it, his eyes, alight with strong feeling, met those of the demi-man straight

“ *Sangue di Cristo* ! Gian Battista, the Traitor’s Tree is less accursed than I, bearing thee ! ” he said thickly as they disappeared

Jean Gordon had faced Sandy with wicked eyes

“ The luck’s ours, Sandy,” she whispered, “ and minx Chrystal’s knot can be soon untied ! Spell me *Ogilvie of Barras*, Tod, and you have a guess of what *O* and *B* stand for ! ”

Her mood seemed whetted by his silence

“ Megsty me, man ! has your courting deafened ye to the talk of the housetops ? ” she exclaimed “ Do ye no’ ken that *Ogilvie of Barras* is governor of Dunnottar Castle ? ”

“ I ken it now, madam,” Sandy returned

“ Ay, ye ken it now ! ” mocked the woman “ And ye ken too, belike, that the Committee of Estates, with the Earl Marischal, *Ogilvie’s* master, have been carted prisoners to London from Alyth by Noll Cromwell—rot him ! But ye do not know everything, Tod ! ”

"Only One does that, madam," said Tod Sandy

"I would ye did, Sandy, for then should we know how Major Weir came by the key in the first o't," returned Lady Jean, speaking very soft and quick "For when Barras was put in charge of Dunnottar, it chanced that the old steward, who had been page to the Earl Marischal's grandfather, fell sick, and coming to the dying, revealed to Barras the spring of a secret place in the castle, the whilk it was custom never to impart to more than two of a generation, the living owner of Dunnottar and his steward But the times being troublous, and the Earl away, and the steward in 'the steep places,'¹ it seemed well to him to pass on the secret to Governor Barras, who rates his own skin a trifle cheaper than Dunnottar! But two ears more than his heard the secret, Sandy, and the tongue belonging to them betrayed it, as we make our guess, to one of the Malignant party"

She paused for breath, but the Hope preserved his listening silence

"Barras learnt the treachery, though too late to catch the traitor," she went on rapidly, "and he guessed that the secret place would be soon an open secret So it appeared to him his wisest to have a lock fashioned with all a clever smith's cunning, and that it was to be the craftsman's last piece of work, Tod, would have been a safe wager For, leaving the castle the night the job was done, he slipped by some mischance over the drawbridge that links Dunnottar with solid ground, and the trick of the lock perished with him in the sea that howls night and day around the walls like the castle's watch-dog!"

"One sees the finger o' Providence in such happenings!" quoth Tod Sandy

"But the key of the lock—wrought as it was into Ogilvie's initials, that it should seem, did any spy it, to be some of his private matters—was in the governor's keeping, and it was best that it should be

¹ Dying

parted and widely, from the lock " Lady Jean ignored his interruption " Barras deemed the messenger he entrusted to place it in the Earl's hands trustworthy above all men, yet so much alone is certain, that tale or tidings of the key from that day to this have been wanting Some say that the messenger was slain in the stinking traitor Grahame's rebellion, and some say that the Earl Marischal inclines more to the Malignants than he allows, but what's true's truth is, that the key is gone ! "

" But not the whole truth, madam," said Tod Sandy

" What's your meaning ? "

" Your story, madam, is like the key itself, in that something of importance lies behind it ! "

With the sentences, quick-flickering like the thrust and riposte of encountering blades, the air of the room seemed of a sudden sultry Lady Jean stepped to and fro, her hands at her bosom again as though to ease it of a pressure

" What think you of love, Sandy ? " she demanded, swinging short round on him

" 'Tis the horse that runs away wi' fools till it lands them in a bog, madam ! " returned he patly

" And hate, Sandy ? What think ye of hate ? "

" Hate, madam, is the hound that'll run through the day, but it will pull down its game ! " said the Borderman

The woman gave vent to her shrill laugh

" Your wit is whelped by a man, Tod," she cried, ' a woman would conceive it differently And to my mind, Love is the gowan-chain—bound by the nature o't to break or wither—wi' which children link themselves together, but hate's the chain that holds, as the galley slaves that sweep the roads in France are linked—and though one may be count and the other *canaille*—each to each till their work is done ! " She stretched out her hand in a quick commanding gesture " Such a link binds you and me, Sandy, and it is for you to use the whip which I can put into your hand for the proper chastisement of my Mistress Minx, Chrystal Hope ! "

The malicious eager face bent closer to him

"What think ye, Sandy, anent the punishment the Parliament would mete out to the besom and her lover, caught red-handed in an attempt to *lift* the Honours of Scotland! Would that whip no' have a sting to it?" she asked softly

"The Honours of Scotland! Woman, you're no' at yourself!" gasped Sandy unceremoniously

"Crown, sceptie, and sword of state, Sandy, wi' their crosses floree, saltire, and patee, wi' their pearl-points and their fleurs-de-lys, and the great beryl on the sceptie's nose! Man, for longer than any outside Moray House kenned, they have been forth and away from their keeping-place in the Castle of Embro', as being too kenspeckle a spot for them to cuddle in with the Englishry this side Tweed. In Dunnottar's secret place they are, and to Dunnottar Gordon of Brackley"—she set her teeth on the name—"is jogging, to turn the key, pilfered by his limmer, in the lock, and to make his own of the Regalia!"

"A woman is aye surest of what she knows nothing!" the Hope cavilled at her triumphant period
"This can be no more than guesswork wi' your ladyship"

"Less guesswork than a man's laying down the law anent women is apt to be!" Jean Gordon retorted "Ay, am I sure of what I say, by the evidence of the keyhole!"

"The keyhole?"

"The keyhole of the room where Major Weir a month or so ago was closeted with mine uncle of Argyle, and such a key on the table between them," Jean avowed boldly "Argyle's strong chest holds less of value than he thought, when he requited Master Weir with gold, and bade him speak no more on the matter with any—even the forward lass' self, since her theft was so soon wedded away from her! Had the men confabulating heard this story of a false key, maybe they would not have been for dealing so mimly wi' Chrystal minx, fooling them

with a dummy, while she unlocked the treasure-house of her leman's kisses with the true one! Ay, but the play's not played out yet!" She stopped again, white teeth bared by red lip "Do you see your part, man Sandy? do you see your part?"

"That of a stalking-horse, as I take it, madam," quoth the Hope. The woman surveying him kept silence for an instant longer.

"They were wise folk who nicked you wi' the name Tod, Sandy!" she said. "Ay, as you guess 'tis better that my house should not show in this matter, and if you are the one to delate the plot to the Parliament, you will be the one to be rewarded!" She paused expressively. "But there's more in the job than to whisper a few words and to pocket the gold pieces, man! I can watch as you have seen, minx Chrystal and her doings, and yon gusly imp of an Italian will watch her sweetheart's lodging, but it is for you, once the key is turned in the lock, to watch my gallant Gordon, night and day, day and night, till the plot is ripe for the Parliament's plucking. To Dunnottar, Tod, and don't let the scent grow cold before that hate of yours."

"'Tis a far road to Dunnottar, madam, and speed is best wakened by a golden spur," said Sandy.

The woman uttered an exclamation of impatience and pounced on the scattered trinkets about the floor.

"There and there and there!" she cried, as she crammed the glittering things into his pockets. "These pearl ouches will fetch broad pieces, and that enamelled chain was bought by its weight in good French crowns from a Jew in Leipzig fair, and those amethyst buttons were once on a king's doublet! A widow of the Precision has little need for jewels," she muttered, "and the wife of a—king will have more than she can wear." The spite in her leapt up again in the pale blue eyes. "I would sell my sark if that was needed to buy my revenge!" she cried.

"The cutty once out of my way, and I'll wager my face will need no gewgaws to do my business' So 'Ho' for Dunnottar, man, and the untying of one knot of your sudary' "

The light was westering in the streets as the Hope stepped once more into the alley ramparted by the beetling houses. As he looked at the walls of Balmerino House, the red-haired man fell to fingering the knotted handkerchief.

"There are more knots than one to be untied," he muttered with the cunning look.

Walking with lowered eyes that seemed to follow the unravelling of a thought as much as the path beneath the feet, the Borderman won to the West Bow, but did not curve into it. Instead he kept forward, turning the cunning look from side to side, as he dived stealthily into the mere passage-way between houses that stood, as it would seem, at right angles to the Bow.

Before one, the house flanked by a dark turret ascending from the street, he stopped, running his hand down the lintel of the door of the tower. The spring surrendered to his questing touch, and opened noiselessly on the windings of a stair, embarked upon by Sandy with no hesitation. Two or three turns in blackness up the newel stair, and Hope found himself on the threshold of a room furnished scantily, the man within, seated with his back to him, bending over a table strewn with papers.

As though startled by the reaching of his goal, the intruder stood fast, the greenish eyes darting curiosity at the papers with their cabalistic markings, the gaunt uncurtained bed, the great drifted pile of boots and shoes heaped against the wall. Not a board had creaked under his approach, not a breath drawn by him had betrayed his presence, when the man poring over his papers spoke.

"What business brings you into my private chamber, Sandy Hope?"

A start shook the Borderer's spare limbs, but he answered boldly.

"To get back my purse from ye, Major Weir"

The figure bending over the papers did not spare a glance from them

"Of what purse is your speech?"

"The purse wi' which I paid my share in your threefold bargain, Thomas Weir!" The Hope's fawning voice had risen a note, he was lashing himself to anger, to better outface the controlled impassiveness of the other

"I made no bargain with you, friend"

"Then maybe ye did wi' Jock," returned Sandy more quietly "Wi' Jock belike, and perchance too wi' him who's lodged in the Balmerino House, Major Weir! A dream dreamt three times comes true, folk say, so if I've dreamed my part o' the bargain, the other two are there to prove it true, and I'll wake to find my purse back in my pouch, or ye'll wake to what ye never dreamt o'—the citing yourself before the Kirk Commission!" The sound of his own voice emboldened him, he advanced farther into the room as he slapped the pocket swollen with Jean Gordon's jewels "Gude kens, 'tis not so much the worth o' what ye've had weighs wi' me, wi' ten times more on me at this present, but there's few can afford to play at wits wi' Sandy the Tod and rise up the winner, Weir, my man!"

Major Weir rose to his feet at last

"In what words did I make this bargain you speak of?" he demanded The question seemed to sap the confidence of the Hope's attitude

"Silence can speak as clear as words by times," he stammered "And ye took the purse!"

A smile writhed slightly the other's lips

"The Ecclesiastical Commission will want proof of that, Sandy!" he said "Prove it, man, and you have me on the hip! Prove it, if only to escape the punishment meted out by the Commission to false witnesses! Better no trouble spared in establishing the proof of the accusation, than your tongue bored through by hot irons or hangman Cockburn's whip about your ribs," went on the level

voice, touched with a sardonic merriment "Would you have light for the quest, this chamber darkens early?"

A light leapt through the gathering shadows, dazzling the Hope's sight. It had burnt for a second or so before with a gasp he distinguished it to be a human hand, each brown shrivelled finger a lighted taper, the withered wrist held upright by the man standing over against him. "Cannot you find the missing proof even by the light of *the hand*?" he asked again, the low devilish merriment still in his voice.

With eyeballs fascinated, the Borderman stood fast, his look following the fiery hand which Major Weir, his dark stare heavy on the crafty face, moved from side to side. His voice reached Sandy's ears, but faintly.

"Go then, delate me before the Commission! Hasten, perchance the proof will yet be found!"

Under the eyes with their compelling power, Sandy stood, power of motion rapt from him. The voice sounded faintly again.

"Hot-foot for your revenge you came, what has staled your appetite?"

Banned before him the Hope stood—living soul in dead body. A tehee of great laughter went out on the silence, immoderate peals of terrible mirthlessness. The soul shuddered.

"Sandy Hope, can you hear me? Speak!"

The awful laughter was hushed, and Major Weir stood, an incarnate Will, before his prey. The flaming hand had been extinguished, the twilight in the room was light enough to reveal the two faces to each other.

"I hear!" the soul answered through the dead lips.

"Can you move hand, foot, or tongue, save at my will?"

"I cannot!" the soul made answer.

"Give me then that which bulks your pockets!" ordered the level voice. The dark gaze glistened with an eagerness as the Borderman's hands moved,

bringing Lady Jean's bounty to gleam out through the shadows about the men

"The dead man's hand *doth* reveal hidden treasure!" Weir muttered with the withen smile as the jewels passed into his keeping. He moved towards the wall, to touch a spring in the wainscoting, laying bare a cavity in which he bestowed his new-got gains, glint of gold and shimmer of gems scentillating from the hiding-place. Releasing the concealing panel, he wheeled on his prisoner, turning him towards the door of his entiance

"Go, and forget!"

Step by step he drove him before him down the twisted stair, till the turret-door cast the prey into the haar beginning to drift up from the sea. The chill wind of its approach blew against the dark man peering from within the dooi-lintel till the receding figure was blotted out by the thickening air, but the damps on Major Weir's forehead owed nothing to the sea-fog, when at last he appeared to relax a tension straining his whole being to the uttermost

"This time at least I have put my will on him!" he panted, wiping the sweat of effort from the dank black hair. "Let him wake now, and serve my turn again!"

Staggering like a man in wine, the Borderman came to himself, in the sea-haar and the night which it had hurried in its train. He had wandered to parts of the town foreign to him, and the strange trance had brought a sluggishness into his blood, making him only minded for warmth and rest for his chilled and languid limbs. For a while he leaned torpidly in the dooiway within which he had drifted, then a passing woman's laugh woke in the numbed brain the events in Jean Gordon's Lodging. He carried his hand to his pockets with a sudden thought

"Robbed! I have been robbed!"

The cry rushed out on the night, the ring in it flatted by the fog. With feverish movements Sandy plunged his hands into pocket after pocket,

bringing from one the knotted kerchief and from another the slip of paper which he had made his own in his rendezvous of the previous night. Feeling it in his fingers, he paused, in the effort of recollection with which one strives to recall an eluding dream.

"Meseems I came to the door of yon dark tower o' his!" he muttered half-aloud, his thought diving again and again into the roaring gulfs of past consciousness, without bringing up a shied of memory from all that had sunk within them. He shook his head at last.

"By this billet remaining to me, it's no' like that Major Weir had his hand in my pouches this night!" he murmured. "The bit paper is the first thing that he would have taken into his keeping, as telling a kennin' over much o' his trafficks!" He pressed his fingers on his swimming temples. "I must have been spied upon and drugged at the tavern where I called for the tass of aqua vitæ!" he concluded. "I mind it was of an unco strength, no doubt it was spiced to steal my wits!"

He made a step from the doorway, and stopped again.

"What tale have I that would get me my own back?" he muttered in his self-communings. "To tell of pockets stuffed wi' a lady's jewels would lead to as many questions as the Shorter Carritch, and I misread her sore if the gay madam who gave them would not lie as stoutly's Ananias and his goodwife, sooner than let a breath o' yon key and what it locks win abroad. To lose the bonny gold and pearls is bad enough, but to lose ears or to gain forty stripes at the Cross would be a hantle worse, and that's all the man with the three-legged tale I have would win from the Provost and his bailies!"

The drifting haar masked the cunning look coming slowly on the Hope's face.

"Yon fine madam gave me more than precious stones!" he gurned. "And her secret has gold in it!"

Seeming to have taken a resolution, he groped his way towards a house with lights burning sawow through the fog. A request to be set on the way to the West Bow was answered by the appearance of a man with a lantern.

"Am about wandeing thither myself," he said civilly. "For haar or no haar, to-night is the night o' the prayer-assembly there, and there's few o' us wad let fire or water, let be the haar, keep us awa' when Major Weir prays!"

The escort was welcome, and the men groped their way forward, reinforced on the road by other pious pilgrims, announced by the flickering of the lights carried by them. The group was taciturn, and an indistinct murmur from the Borderman, accompanied by the rubbing of his dry lean hands, was probably ascribed to the rapt ejaculation of godly meditation.

"There are four knots in the kerchief," the red-haired man grinned. "And three at least bind a profit up wi' them!"

The usual brilliant lighting of the Weir "land" flouted the haar as the congregation stumbled at last through the Stinking Close. Sandy, among the foremost, perceived the figure of the master of the house standing within the open door, an odd ring of prismatic radiance around him cast on the thickened air by the garish lights.

"As the glory on the face o' Moses!" a female admirer ejaculated somewhere. Another voice at a greater distance responded, with a reckless ring in it that sent a start through Alexander Hope.

"Or as the light that proceedeth from a rotten fish!" it said.

Sandy, from the vantage of the lighted hall, peered at the entering countenances. He pressed his hand on that swimming head, as stranger after stranger filed past, each with a word of greeting to the man who leant on the black staff at the stairfoot. The Hope drew a sigh of relief as the last-comer set foot on the stair.

"The drug the thieves drugged me wi' is still in my blood, an' plays its cantrips with me," he decided "Esme winna leave the Tolbooth till he's carried to the gallows-tree the morn's morn'!"

"Is it your purpose to be wed to-night?"

The question, low-pitched but distinct, shattered further dwelling on the illusion in him. Major Weir stood at his elbow.

"Od man, wi' whom?"

"With the rents and fiars of Clear Havens!" quoth the dark man, his lips touched by a fugitive saidonic smile.

A recollection of the billet that recommended a speedy riddance to a safe distance of a dangerous quantity, flashed an illumination through Sandy Hope's perplexity. But the foxy face upraised towards the taller man permitted itself nothing but a question.

"She is here," the other answered it. He signed the Hope up the stair, following on his heels. The smell of wine and strong waters was perceptible to the Borderer, even before they entered the great chamber, where Grizel, her distaff laid aside, was serving one and another with comfortable liquors. Major Weir's voice at its mellowest sounded before him.

"Good friends, the night is rough, and there are those among us with but weak flesh. Grudge not to comfort yourselves before the business of the assembly shall commence."

A hum of approbation saluted his invitation, but Grizel, creeping up to him, rounded a whisper into his ear, gusty-ominous as the wind beginning to move through the night without.

"Let us set the casement open for the corbies gathering from the four corners for the bakements of the dead-chack, Thomas Weir! *For I see your shroud rising to your knees!*"

Major Weir's look was evil, but the business of filling and emptying distracted attention on the guests' part, and none except the Hope noticed the

moment when the host quitted them. The black staff seemed to move with an alertness in it down the staircase to the door, which had not opened since Chrystal Hope's return that noon.

Chrystal, still flung across her bed as she had first sunk upon it, stirred at the tapping oncoming of the staff. A smile parted the sweet sleeping lips.

"Ay, Blind Hughie, are ye come to lead me back to Clear Havens?" she murmured out of her dream.

The dark face looking down on her softened no whit for the unconscious innocence. He shook the girl by the shoulder as though he would shake the dream from her.

"I would speak with you, Chrystal Hope!"

Avoiding the relentless hand with her first movement, Chrystal woke to the darkness and the voice. She faced anticipated displeasure with no more than outer tremblings.

"Girl, the tether of my patience is strained to the breaking-point! Not once or twice have I warned you of light conduct which would bring discredit on my house, yet you persisted therein, making a mock of my authority. Therefore as your guardian, and answerable to your dead father, it seems best to bring you into the keeping of an honest man, who is willing to make you his wife at the soonest possible!"

The sentences, peeling out of the darkness, fell like blows. The girl stretched out her hand to the dimly-seen figure lowering above her.

"Sir, Major Weir, wake me from this evil dream!"

"No dream, wench!" The passionless response came stunningly through the darkness. "The groom waits above to wed you!"

"Eh, man! His name?" A vibration of hope shook the four words.

"Your kinsman, Alexander Hope!"

With the shriek of one grasped by a pursuing fear, Chrystal threw herself towards the door.

"Not while water can drown or fire can burn!" she cried "Sandy Hope may have me dead, but never living!"

At her wild words the man blocking her path had given back, she had gained the corridor. There Weir, his eyes black in a ghastly face, was upon her.

"Loose another sound, and he *shall* have you dead!" he muttered at her ear, dragging her towards his chamber.

"Neither dead nor living, while God's in His heaven!"

Chrystal had writhed free, thrown herself on her knees. The faith that makes weakness strength was in her upraised face.

A devilish laughter stole out on the darkness, then a light dazzled the brave eyes. A cry of horror broke from the girl's lips.

"The Hand of Glory!"

As though the flame had power to pierce the past, the memory of Grizel's words, so long believed a fever-dream, started in living memory within her. Her will tense in her, her whole being a prayer, Chrystal wrenched her look from the flaming hand, from the fascination of the eyes riveted on her, as she wrought against the will-power being put forth on her, not for an instant letting her thought wander from the prayers framed by her shuddering lips, not for an instant letting her glance stray to the fiery hand, endowed by the creed of superstition with paralysing properties. The habit of resistance to such will-pressure, gained in the silent duels at Coniston, served her well in this deadliest struggle, when it was no longer a mere question of gaining a useful disciple, but of stifling a rebellion that, if successful, would work chaos in the cunning plot concerted by Major Weir when he brought the orphan home to him in Edinburgh town.

Numb as it were, in the tension of the fierce soul-battle, Chrystal could not judge of the length of the strange combat *à l'outrance*. The dazzling

light had vanished when she rallied consciousness to understand the words being spoken close to her

"Lass, I did but test you! If in sooth your repugnance to your kinsman be so strong, I will cease to urge the marriage, but needs force that you come with me to let him take the denial from your own lips"

Too dazed for suspicion at the unlooked-for truce, Chrystal surrendered herself to the hand dragging her to her feet. The staircase reeled under her, she was fain to lean on the arm supporting her to the room where the prayer-assembly waited

More than one goodwife was pressing about the lily girl solicitously helped to a seat by the host, with touch and eyes kind as a woman, but Major Weir motioned them back, himself leaning over to fill out the cup of wine which he held to her lips

"There is nought amiss but the fears of a maid," he said, turning his grave half-smile on the women. "My ward is weak from recent illness, and still further shaken by the plottings of divers needy kinsmen of her own, who grudge her bestowing herself and her goods on the man she has chosen. Wherefore, friends, to avoid violence, it has been concerted that the wedding shall take place here and now, with all present for witnesses!"

"And Angelical Thomas to call a blessing!" Grizel muttered wildly. "But *who is he* who entered wi' you, brother, and stands by ye there to give the bride away?"

With the draught of wine a languor had fallen on Chrystal, clogging hand and foot, as though Death were stealing on her by inches, she sat unable for a movement when Sandy Hope advanced upon her, unable for a cry or sound to voice her frantic resistance when he grasped her hand. Trampling feet upon the stairway and strange voices went unheeded by the ears, shuddering from the words which should be spoken by the red-haired man

"This is my wife!"

Tod Sandy opened lips to speak them, and Chrystal sat dumb. She felt Major Weir's hand in heavy benediction, ready to press down her head for the sign of assent.

CHAPTER XVI

STORM STRESS

A STRANGE company broke into the chamber

The attention riveted a second before on the wedding-group, the bride drooping in the great chair, the ill-favoured groom beside her, and the tall dark man behind, wavered at the sudden invasion. Men,—bronzed as if by alien suns,—some bearded and wild-haired, others shorn of all but fierce moustachios twisted to the eyes, with garments of cut and fashion unknown to Edinburgh, some ten or twelve such appeared in the sight of the marvelling congregation, and spreading themselves fanwise at each side of the doorway left the figure of the leader a step in advance.

The man, standing thus before his band, was an apparition calculated to bring the heads of the assembly together in hurried conjecture of consultation. He showed tall and vigorous, with a black beard waistlong hiding a good part of a face almost coffee-coloured. Eyes incongruously blue, sparkled in quick fierce glances under the green turban jauntily stuck on the shorn head, the green repeated in the shawl twisted about the loins, with a curved scimitar and brace of pistols thrust in its folds. Fiercely pointed slippers peeping from the edges of the full Turkish drawers completed the outlandishness of the stranger's appearance, but as he spoke on the amazed silence, the voice was Scottish, though the speaker, halting for his word, and with here and there a seeming mental translation, was apparently employing a long-disused tongue.

"Oh, worshipful Master Weir!" he said, "I

demand of your hand my brother's child Chrystal Hope ! ”

“ ’Tis a palatine ! ” an Aberdeen man’s voice sounded in sharp whisper Major Weir advanced a step

“ Who are you to demand thus ? ”

“ As friend of Clear Havens, you will have heard of the young lad Andrew his brother who set sail from Scotland, and was never heard of more ? ” returned the other “ Little guessed they, if any, who mourned, that he they deemed drowned had been taken with his ship by Barbary corsairs, and sold of them into slavery ”

“ Trepanned by pirates ! Said I not he was a palatine ? ” exclaimed the Aberdeen man.

“ How came you to escape, friend ? ”

Major Weir, bending over his black staff, seemed listening to an inward voice

“ Thanks be, I am now free and of means,” the man answered “ The ship that the worthy bodies of Traffickers and Maltmen of Leith took for an Algerine rover when she showed in the Firth the morn, is mine own, and I have turned my skill in garden work to some account in Morocco-land, forbye in the first gaining my master the Vizeer’s favour by curing a blight in his favourite rose-tree I had aye a turn for grafting and budding—Andrew’s Patch is still, I dare swear, to be seen at Clear Havens where the loaning falls away to the burn ! ”

Major Weir’s pause was filled by Sandy, edging himself to the front

“ Ye’ll have proofs o’ what ye say, man ? ” he observed insinuatingly The blue eyes came on him

“ A callant trepanned and sold in the slave-market of Tunis is little like to have many family jewels or papers about him after thirty odd years ! But who are you that seem minded to play the lawyer, for all the world like those cuddled down in the wooden hutches of the law quarter of Tangier ? ”

“ Ou, just a Hope ! ” The red-haired man shifted on one foot under the scrutiny of the blue eyes

"A Hope? By the red colouring I would jalouse you of the branch that have aye held to the Old Religion," remarked the other "Ye'll be oe of the red Hope who hunted the Puritan preacher-man with hounds into Fala Moss, till cold and hunger made an end of him?"

"I—I—was turned from the error of my forefathers by Master Rutherford," quoth Sandy in a hurry. The blue eyes sparkled.

"O traitor and sons of traitors!" he said fiercely "Years since, on a journey I fell in with one from Kirkcudbright, shipwrecked in his voyage to the Virginian plantations, where he was to have been sold into slavery by the treachery of the informer who had led those in the pay of Sydserff of Brechin to break up a conventicle, as it hearkened to the preaching of that same Master Rutherford. With gnashings of teeth he was wont to recall the greater number of his fellow-worshippers transported like himself, or his minister in exile and durance at Aberdeen, and the name that was aye with curses on his lips was that of the informer, Sandy Hope."

With blanched cheeks and shaking lips the red-haired man had listened to the stern-ringing indictment, as it ceased he stole his furtive look about. He knew the hush for the breathless silence before the storm, and suddenly with bent head flung himself towards the doorway to rush down the staircase into the night.

"An Arminian! A Prelatist! Ane o' the cubs o' Antichrist wha' cast oot godly Rutherford from's charge o' Anwoth! Odsake, an unco queer bridegroom to wed an innocent lassie on!"

The murmurs of the assembly were ominous as the moaning discontent in the tops of trees doomed by the coming storm, but the dark man, straightening himself at last on the staff, did not cast a look upon the whispering groups. He stepped closer to the stranger, who with a quick sign had restrained a movement among his men to follow Sandy's flight.

"Friend," Major Weir's look was keen, but the

mellow voice was strong and steady, "I have here the will of Clear Havens, appointing me the guardian of his daughter Chrystal Yet I would have you know that if you acknowledge my rights in this matter, there need be no disputing of your blood!"

With a swift half-turn the stranger obeyed the significance in the other's eyes, and interposed the spreading folds of his caftan between the spectators and the document displayed by Thomas Weir As he bent over them a leaf fluttered accidentally, it revealed folded within the papers a sliver of slate with crooked lines of writing scratched upon it in red

The stooping figure rose up slowly

"I am ready to do honour to my blood," he said, looking Weir in the eyes "And I claim my kinswoman Chrystal Hope from this night forth!"

A hesitation might be guessed at in the dark man, throwing now a glance as of relief towards the girl who could tell a dangerous story, with then a look measuring, as it were, the mood of the company As though their watchful silence conveyed a warning, Major Weir spoke at last

"Not here and now, friend! Your proofs as to who and what you are must be brought to the Courts, and my ward herself asked as to her mind to go forth with you" He made a motion of stepping towards Chrystal "She is in the faints with the vanishing of her bridegroom!" he said, "and is in no state for you, sir!"

"No thanks to you that her state is not by now the blessed state of matrimony!" shouted the stranger "Faints—'tis you are in the feints, Master Weir, but burst me! if I don't let blood to bring you to yourself if the same chamber holds us another moment! Give way there, if you would not have me make a burning of this roof-tree and all under it to light our road for us!"

The fierceness of his eyes, his voice, seemed to set the room in flame, men turning on each other, women shrieking and hampering their men-folks' arms With blue eyes flashing like the scimitar swung about

his head, the palatine was on the girl behind the dark figure, and Weir lifted no finger to stay the purpose in him. With a great shout the turbaned man flung the white slight creature across his shoulder, a bound placed him in the midst of his band, their levin-naked blades ringing him round.

A rush came about the doorway, voices crying on the Town Guard, and the black shame to let a lass be trepanned in the sight of Christian men, and the night so wild.

"Ye fools!" the palatine shouted, "who see danger for the girl in God's night and sea and storm, but none for her in your Major Weir!"

With the words his men's feet and his were on the stairway, but the assembly hung back from pursuit. The man leaning sombre on his staff watched in silence askance glances aimed at him, with whispers that ran to and fro as lightning flickers here and there in the cloud ripening for storm. As though shepherded by a dread which the wild words had left behind, the people who had come to pray huddled in groups from the room, only a few pausing for good-nights that held something furtive to the tall figure with the brooding look. That brooding look appeared to be turned on past as well as future, recognising too late the mistake of the publicity of the prayer-assembly, chosen as it had been for the marriage scene, that the subsequent disappearance of the ward possessing knowledge that it was of importance to banish from Edinburgh town might be satisfactorily explained in the eyes of all men. So much clear, but that survey of the past in the light of the present, which men call regret, hovered over another point,—that the tactics of surface passivity so long triumphant, had been pursued a night too long, a night that held the dawn of a morrow in it which would bring unlooked for happenings to pass in the house of the West Bow. Sharply through the stillness of the now empty room the fragment of Lammermuir slate fell to the floor, as gravel might trickle on the coffin-lid of one who had

lost the life in him to gain what after all availed nothing. But at the starfoot the assembly in its haste paused and listened at the fierce awful laughter that rang down to them from the chamber they had left.

"They will come again!" It was Mad Güzels' voice, but the laughter had not been hers. "And he that entered wi' ye this night will come and go no longer, but will bide unto the end!"

The wind and the sea were playing at the ball with a ship out on the Firth.

The groaning of the cordage and the shrieks of the buffeted vessel had been long in Chrystal's ears, when at last the drug had dreed itself out in her. She came to herself lying in an elbow of a bulwark, its capabilities of shelter heightened by a canvas, pegged as much as might be, between her and the wind that scourged the streaming, slanting deck. The air was pale with dawn, but as she lay the sullen grey of a clouded sky was all that met the girl's eyes, the rush of waves past her ears dizzying sense so that she was fain to shut out the cold comfort of sight with her heavy eyelids.

A step on the swaying deck, a voice loud above the stormy water, came to her with an odd familiarity, stealing her thoughts to stray in the clover-sweet uplands of the Lammermuirs, where she and the dairy lassies had pastured the cattle in many a yearly summering at Clear Havens. That step and voice had been as familiar on the heather as the shrill business of the plover, they had heralded many a frolic in her still girlish life, before the good-natured playfellow had been lost in the unwelcome lover. They lulled her now in her dreams to a pleasant feeling of security, as though the grey walls of Clear Havens lay within a stone's-throw still, till the restless thought wandering at will in the past, brought up, as an evil wraith might take shape on a heedlessly-spoken incantation, the image of a red-haired man with a cunning look, who, in the old father-

warded time had had power to do no more than send a shudder of aversion over her whenever their eyes had met. Like ghosts at cockcrow, the dear dead days fled away from her before the breaking in of the present with its grip on her throat. Chrystal started up, clutching at her ring-finger. For surely Sandy Hope had, somewhere and somehow, stood by her, saying before witnesses that he would make her his wife.

"Esmé! Esme Hope!" she called, as she had called on the day when the slippery hill-shale had betrayed her feet, sliding with her towards a rocky edge and a sheer drop into the valley where the feeding sheep had looked like mushrooms.

Clutching at the shiprail, the girl looked round her in amazement. Instead of the sunny uplands of her dream, a keel labouring through green water-troughs was under her feet, the kinsman she had called stood near, not in the weather and wine-stained fineries in which she had been used to see him at Clear Havens, but in strange foreign garments, over which her glance strayed wonderingly, while the reckless familiar voice sounded in answer to herself.

"Hast snoozed it out at length, pretty coz? Burn me, if I did not think to have made France before you woke, but the ship's crew must, to a man, have been letting their minds run on dogs or cats, to say nought of the pigs and hares which, folk say, bring ill-luck, for such a wind as this to have got up in our teeth!"

"Esmé!" cried Chrystal, and grasped at him with that ringless hand, "am I wife of Sandy Hope?"

"Troth, many a man would not care to be nearer death than you were near being wife of him last night!" responded Esmé. "But for me, pretty petticoat, you would have been, though ods' dreams must go by contraries, if in that sleep o' yours you were for wedding the Tod!"

Chrystal pressed her hands on her temples.

"Dreams! eh, the fearsome dream! The burning

hand and Major Weir—*oh, no dream! no dream!*” Her voice shrilled suddenly above wind and water: “Esmé, for God’s sake tell truth! did Sandy not say the words?”

“Devil a word! for the guests that came to his marrying, though a thought late, were in time! Thanks to me, or rather, thanks to your stars, for, not to pluck Truth of a feather, I thought of no more than popping on my sweet Sir Sin-on-the-Sly in his praying, and trying if I could not teach him to blush a bit before the godly congregation by some words keeping hot on my tongue-tip for him! But as we made the doorway, there was Reverend Master Fool-the-Folk holding forth on the maid who was for wedding the man of her heart, and Sandy standing by as sleek as sorts the tod with the plumpest gosling o’ the cleckin about to be coffined in his gurning jaws,—and a murrain on ’em!”

“Eh, Esmé lad, and you wi’ the smell o’ the Tolbooth on ye, to risk yourself for me!” cried Chrystal in her frank gratitude. The contrast of relief was upon her in comparison with Sandy and his cunning, she felt a rush of the pleasant oldtime friendship towards the kinsman whose reckless words and ways flaunted the worst of him so carelessly in the eyes of all men. In the face of the snake the lion may seem a gallant enemy, but Danger challenging individuals on Life’s highway has a choice of weapons, and can strike as shrewd a blow at times by the rush-and-joar method, as at others by the noiseless arrow flickering home through the dark.

“And would, if the Parliament, with Satan for its head and old Noll for the tail, had been in the place of the prayer-assembly!” responded Esmé quickly. “But with the contrivance I had hit on I could have hobnobbed with the Provost and the fat, fatter, and fattest of his bailies, and run no risk! Ye’ll mind having heard Clear Havens tell a score of times of his brother Andrew, who in his callant-days sailed away from Scotland, but never home?”

The wind combing the running waves sent the spindrift across his laughing face

"If Andrew was a right Hope, small fear that he'd have grudged to help another of the blood at a pinch," he went on "At French Marseilles I have seen enough of the Barbary Moors to borrow a trick or so of their bearing as well as poor Andy's name, for which I paid him by the history I wove for him! The old Jew at Leith has chests enow of dead men's clothes in the cellars below his shop, and I rigged out myself and those of the clan who have wandered out with me from the Lammemmuirs, till Mahound himself would have been put to it to tell us from the Faithful!" His laughter rang out into the gale "You should have seen the long snouts the folk at the Watergate pulled when the crew of the ship we had paid a two-three at Leith to set about in men's ears was a Barbary rover, stood before them, mincing and chopping the honest Scotch in our mouths, as a Frenchman will mince up a good sheep's-head into an outlandish dish with no taste o' poor Mall in't! 'The Provost and magistrates are in council, and may in nowise be broken in on,' quo' they 'God be wi' them,' quo' I, 'but I want nought o' them save and except my kinswoman, Chrystal Hope!' 'In what airt dwells she?' said they 'They over yonder at my old home on the Lammemmuirs told me with one Major Weir,' gave I it back to them Then they whispered and wagged their beards on each others' noses, and one was for this and the other for that, till old Nial—ye'll mind Nial, who squired me to France and back, as he would to the moon if I had a mind to go—cried out that girls must be scarcer in Embro' than in Morocco, if the burghers would risk having their town burnt for them rather than let a lass go with her kinsman That sorted them! 'Swear till us that you will but fetch the lass from the Bow, and forfeit the city forthwith,' said they 'Ay will I, as a bird forfeits last year's nest,' said I, making shift to bungle the Scotch

So they tacked on a file of the Town Guard to our heels, and bade them march us through to the Bow, but I was first at his Saintship's gate in the haar, and was cuckoo enough to risk all by letting fly a gibe that made Sandy prick up his ears. Near like was I then to taking cover till the Tod should be gone about his business, till I glimpsed through the doorcrack what was forward, and that it was Now or Never for you and me ! ”

“What if they had guessed your disguise, and set the Town Guard on ye ! ” cried Chrystal. Esmé's teeth showed mischievously.

“’Twould have been a fit trick for Sandy, but by deil's luck I had the shangan to pinch the dog's tail with sorely enough to make him run ! What chance had he with the godly assembly, and he held up to shame as the informer who turned traitor in the matter of Rutherford and his congregation ? ’Tis not the first time that the Tod has saved his neck by his heels, but I'll wad the first cup of Beau-gency I drink in France that the world will be older before he shows face again in Edinburgh town ! ”

“Did Sandy do that thing ? ”

“Ay did he, in the years before you chipped the shell. I was a callant, but I mind well Clear Havens forbidding him his roof-tree then and there-after ”

“And he would have married my father's daughter ! ”

The low-spoken words did not escape Esme, bending his handsome head over her.

“Your father's daughter was kept for a better man,” he laughed. “Better than Sandy might he likely be, but it will be no light task to find a better man than I'll be to you, my wife Chrystal ! ”

The gul standing before him flung back her head in a quick defiance.

“Ye'll die a maid, Esmé, if ye wait to wed me ! ”

“False prophet you ! ” The blue eyes laughed into the grey with unabated confidence. “A plague on this wind, but in spite of it we shall make France

between life with Troy Helen and a night with you, the choice is made ! ”

With a spring she had broken the passion of his rush, as a horse is thrown back upon his haunches. A hoarse cry burst from Esmé's lips as the girl-figure showed against the livid sky poised on the taffrail at one moment rushing down into the gulfs of wicked green, at the next spewed high aloft by the contempt of the sea.

“ If the night that sees me your wife is sure as the night that sees me in my coffin, then neither ! ” the girl cried defiance down to him “ I too have a choice, and I choose the sea ! ”

A fearful crash sounded on the ringing tones, the ship reeled and staggered like a man struck in the wind. A rush of seamen reached the poop where the pair stood.

“ Laird, laird, John Bronger his nansel' maun be aboard tae hae brocht this awesome storm on us ! ” they cried “ Half the spars are snappit aff short's carrots, the cathead is driven clean through the studdin' sail, an' the ship's takkin' watter's greedily as a cat sups milk ! ”

The shock had hurled Chrystal to her knees, clinging with both hands to a halyard. With an oath Esme grasped at her.

“ Burst me, if the sea has not chosen us already ! ” he cried “ Beshrew me, lass, you will be more like to get rid of me by living than by drowning, as things look ! ”

Recognising the truce in his tone, Chrystal no longer resisted his grip, her eyes turned fascinated on the madness of sea and sky. The wind had slewed, driving the vessel before it at a tremendous pace, like a live thing she scrambled up and down the waves, shuddering and flinching, with a threat of heeling over in every pitch. The mingling of the driving spray and rain made an obscurity as of the future about the present peril, she drove on through the storm that seemed to fill the world. Crouched passive in her former position, Chrystal

was scarcely aware when Esmé started from her side

"Brail up the lee-yardarm!" he shouted with a peremptoriness that mastered protest "The devil himself could not save us unless we lighten the spars!"

Hours seemed to pass after that before Chrystal once more heard his voice beside her. He held wine to her lips

"No need to starve if we must drown," he was saying "Eat while we may!"

The claret quickened Chrystal's consciousness, she ate the bread he broke in morsels for her lips

"As when we shared our nooning at Clear Havens!" His tone was gay still "Then wee Chrystal was wont to give me a kiss for grace after meat. For sake of auld lang syne, girl, give me one now!"

Chrystal fended him gently off

"My lips are my own no more, Esmé, since him we spoke of took heriot from them of all of me," she said languidly

The anger she had expected did not burst. Esmé had risen from his place, was peering intently into the gloom

"Hangman Cockburn won't be cheated o' his fee by our drowning this time," he exclaimed suddenly "We ride in deeper water than I thought, yonder goes the lantern of a vessel between us and the airt where Nial swore he heard the breakers" He lurched forward among the sailor-men out of sight about the helm "Lay her straight! 'Zooks, the ship out there has sea-room, do ye want to make Norrway that ye should edge out into the North Sea?"

Chrystal stood up unsteadily on her feet, sending her look into the early twilight, it was to her that a faint light wavering here and there was indeed visible. Esmé had forced himself into the steersman's place, the vessel, bridled by strong hands and spurred by the wind, clove the night

A growling as of hungering beasts rose up out of the darkness grown suddenly white. The ship

rushed upon the whiteness, shuddered back, was dragged forward in a race of glimmering surf. Relentless as circumstance the rocks were about her, passionlessly opposing her gallant strength. The breakers slaving at their feet were fed with the fragments of the ship which the rocks, their masters, broke for them.

Into the darkness and the whiteness Chrystal was hurled. The sea leaped at her, lapped at her, tore at her, then a long roller swept her up with it as it raced to the shore. High above the surf she rode on her sea-chariot, then the wave broke, foaming in full stretch, leaving its booty in the lap of the land, conquering by steadfastness.

The struggle with suffocation was over—Chrystal had plunged into an iris-tinted world. There was exquisite pain when it shattered about her, making her aware of rough touches plucking at her garments, her small numb hands.

"Cut the fingers off! 'Tis to save toil and time! The water aye swells 'em i' the rings!" a voice said close to her.

"This one is beggar-bare! No rings, or so much as a jewel in her ear," responded an old woman's cracked tone.

"Leave her then! If the sea has no better a take for's, the fish-oil will have gone wasted to-night!"

A horrible chuckle answered him.

"*Tender flesh and daintily nourished!* Man, gie's a han' to pit her up the beach! The salting-tub has little in't but emptiness!"

Curdled into horror, Chrystal forced herself to stillness in the hands dragging her behind a stack of sandstone rooted above wavemark. Her terrible finders had turned from their trove, their steps and voices growing distant in her ears, before she dared to creep, to peer beyond the angle of rock.

The storm had raged itself out and the moon had taken courage. In the ghostly twilight the girl saw figures flitting here and there upon the beach,

stooping, she divined for what ghastly flotsam, fierce, grasping, callous as a wisp of sea-birds on a shoal of mackerel. The hag who had hirkled from Chrystal's side was in the rear, with a qualm of sick faintness the girl saw her, in apparent despair of outstripping those in front, bring her crutch down stealthily on the head of a man kneeling over his spoil of the sea, his back turned to her approach. The treacherous blow dropped him, its dealer cowered over him, gloating as he had gloated.

A grating on the shingles started Chrystal's gaze aside. A horse, with a lighted lantern swinging under his barrel, paused in his clumsy gallop on the sward to snatch at a tuft of sea-pinks growing at the foot of the cliffs which drew their natural wall up from the strand. The girl watched the waverings of the yellow flame, as he strayed,—the innocent tool of the wreckers' purpose to make the fitful light seem that of a ship tacking on her course. She saw it vanish within some cavity of the rock-wall.

With hope and fear suddenly awake in her, she rose dizzily to her feet. Scarcely knowing what she would do, she walked a few steps, then a shout from the wreckers lashed her to run blindly. In the shadows of the cliffs she slipped along unperceived; the one look she threw behind, almost paralysing her, like the fugitive of Sodom, beyond power of movement. Distinct in a patch of moonlight, the beldame who had felt her flesh as a butcher might feel that of house-lamb, was squatted on the shingle, sharpening a knife that glittered on the tanned sole of her own foot.

The sandstone was pitted with caverns, but Chrystal would none of them. On, farther and farther from that fearful company, her horror hounded her till the delicate body revolted. Her feet had paid the shingle they had trodden with tolls of blood, but she did not feel it, her clothes clung damp as a week-worn shroud about her burning flesh, but she did not know it, her eyes only saw the scene that long lay behind her, her ears heard nothing but the

horrible words that had been spoken over her. She strove on—on—on—and then all at once she knew she could strive no longer.

She had fallen to her knees on the sands, but her fears pecked at her like vultures, they would not let her rest. Beside her an arch, pointed and high as any cathedral portal, broke the rock-front, its curves traceried with moss and ferns. Like the aisle of some great praying-place, the cave stretched back from the entrance, the cool green gloom grateful to the hunted creature dragging herself to take sanctuary within.

The cavern pierced the cliffs for an unknown distance, but Chrystal's strength was spent, her will only sustained her staggering steps till they had placed her beyond danger of eyes from the beach. With so much security, she sank upon the sand where wind had drifted it to a heap, sleep or swoon setting her spirit free to take leave from the body in which it had anguished through a day and a night.

A night and a day, and a night again, had passed before the girl stirred from her sleeping. When at last the grey eyes opened it was to fix themselves dreamily on the cleft high above her head, like a clerestory window in her refuge, through which the blue day threw a smile into the cave's twilight, and the wind sent a breath to stir it into freshness. A pleasant languor lulled her, shutting out thought, even of the hunger and thirst ready to make themselves felt tormentingly when soul and body should have fully made up their quarrel.

A sound, other than the monotonous broken bar of the sand-martins' cheeping, or the poignant song of the lark on his quest for the vanished stars, broke in suddenly upon her content of Lethe. As distant as the lark's song, it rang as clearly—

“Le pauvre Monseigneur d'Elboeu,
Qui n'avait aucun ressource,
Ft qui ne mangeait pas de boeuf,
Le pauvre Monseigneur” —

Chrystal was on her feet. The gay carol was nearer, Esme, unsobered by weather or wreckers,

untouched by the storm or thought of peril for the woman he coveted rather than loved, had stumbled on her hiding-place. The first impulse to throw herself on his protection passed, in a swift reflection that the out-of-elbows kinsman would be further than ever set on repairing his plight, worsened now by his shipwreck, with the gold which Clear Havens' mistress would bring her husband. The morning had retrieved Chrystal's courage, satisfied that a league or so lay between her and the ghouls of the strand, she was readier to face unknown dangers than that advancing upon her in the guise of Dare-the-Deil Esme.

The grey eyes, dreamy no longer, looked round hastily. The weakness of her battered muscles warned her of the uselessness of flight, but a niche above her in the caveside might be reached by two or three convenient crannies. With hand and foot she had achieved it, when the *chanson* burst out again more clearly, the singer, with bent head, coming into sight—

“ ‘Ce pauvre Monseigneur d'Elbœuf—
A maintenant un habit neuf,
Et quelques justes dans sa bourse’—

(troth then ! he was in a better plight than I !)

‘Le pauvre Monseigneur d'Elbœuf’

he had only to go look for his fortune, which had no legs to outrun him with, as a flibbertigibbet of a lass has ! Yet 'twas her little hoof and no other that I've tracked to this Hole i' th' Wa'—rat me ! if the liquor in its cellars isn't a different brand from those of its namesake in Embro' !

‘Le pauvre’—

by my ten toes ! there's the slot again ! ”

Chrystal craned from her jutting shelf. Esmé Hope below was bending over what in the dim light she could scarcely distinguish as her footprint, he was moving on slowly, his eyes on the sand. Half a dozen steps more, four, three, two, and he would have passed beyond sight round a corner of the rock

But at the corner Esmé turned, sweeping the length he had come in a suddenly upraised glance With a great shout of triumph it fell on the girl cowered in her hiding

"Come away, lass!" he cried, "d'ye take Esmé Hope for one of the blasted wreckers down shore that ye should be cuddling there like a wild goose? Losh! since I spied on the sand without here a print that fitted your wee pad as snug as e'er the glass slipper Ashiepat's, I have been nosing along, like any gold-dust seeker looking for *paillettes d'or* in the dry French riverbeds on a summer-day" A shadow drifted over his blue eyes "Blithe news is it that you at least are still on the earth, the sea has twined me from over many good friends who made Death's shore last night, when the ship went down! The two-three men who got off supping with the mermaids are down shore asking you of the fisherfolk, though, *mort de ma vie!* I should have left you out of my prayers this morning, had I said any, since the Kirk Session has made it one of the Seven Sins to pray for the dead!"

Dizzy, weak, Chrystal surrendered to the arms stretched up for her Their strong clasp around her, the laughing blue eyes on her face, she had strength for no more than a breathless whisper

"I will never be your wife, Esmé!"

So faint a defiance

CHAPTER XVII

BY CAWDRON LINN

A WHISTLE from Esme rang, strong and shrill, down the beach

"Best be weighing anchor soon as may be," he said, keeping his arm still about the gul, who indeed could not have walked the cave's length without it "Once let the good folk down there come to an inkling of our small numbers, and they may press their hospitality on us after an ill-convenient fashion they're credited with, making strangers one with themselves by means of the salting-barrel' Ay!" as Chrystal blanched, "hungry folk are apt not to be overly nice in these famine-times, the witches of Haddington, who kept fresh and fair on their pickled snails, are a sign of so much' But never scunner, my doo, we'll find an odd ptarmigan or a leveret on these hills to feed your daintiness in this wedding-week that we've come out o' the sea to meet!" Chrystal's quick fling aside seemed to anger him "Come, lass, 'tis too late for you to play the Difficult with your little oath of the Daisy, '*I love you, I love you not*!'" he minced the words in rough mockery "Better keep on my sunny side, or, by Mother Eve spinning the web of man's sorrow under the apple-tree' the end of this week shall find you humble, glad enough then to be made honest wife!"

The recall had been answered by some five men, and Chrystal mustered them eagerly Her heart sank lower as she recognised all for Esmé's devoted party, men whose years in France and their tempering in the campaigns of the Low Countries, had left them unscrupulous followers of a reckless leader

With hope dying out in her, she clutched Esmé's arm

"Cousin," she whispered, "hear till me for sake of the kindness there's aye been between us! God has kept us in life by His own miracle, and I cannot think it is that you should carry out the devil's purpose! Esmé, if I had not given those folk o' dread," she pointed down the beach, "the slip, I should have died the death you mint at, but eh! rather would I have so died and gone to my father a white maid, than buy my life with my shame!" She searched his face with wild beseeching eyes "I can make no head against ye now, your wild men and you have me in the *tinchel*, but oh, by the soul of your mother, do not put a wrong on me! Let me be, lad, kind Esmé, perhaps the day may come when I shall bid you hold off no longer— Oh, never! never!" she cried, at the sound of her own words "Fear is making me false, false to you as to the man who left me to this plight for his honour's sake, scorning broken faith even to win a love! Eh, Esmé," her piteous wail sharpened into passion, "in your callant-day did ye never chase after a butterfly and close your hand on't, to find nought but broken wings and dust in the stead of the bonny thing ye coveted? Such a Love's changeling will I be, if ye have your will, it'll no' be Chrystal Hope ye come to, but a lass changed from herself, dying of the heartbreak! Mayhap I was wrong when I spoke on the ship of dying by my hand, but"—she showed death-paleness instead of her girl's blush—"from the night ye loose my maiden snood off me death will break into my house of life, though I lift no finger to beckon, if only that I shall have no heart to withstand his coming to the swept and garnished emptiness!"

Esmé's face, transfigured into grimness over the innocent revelations of how far the rival he had scarcely counted worth a thought had outstripped him in the race, was turned to her with a curse

"Come what come may, the night comes first!"

At the words, savagely intoned, Chrystal found

strength to break from him, staggering back into the cave. She had pleaded what she could, and knew she had pleaded in vain, now for the first time despair sapped the gallant ardour that had faced odds so undauntedly and so long. Lying her length, as misery lies, along the ground, she writhed under the goads, heedless of shoutings and tramlings without, till at a louder burst, and now within the cave, she drew herself upright with a sharp breath, facing her worst with black tearless eyes.

But the worst was not upon her yet. Her worst would have been Esmé, ardent, reckless, eager, not Esmé with a fighting-light in his eyes and a fierce set to the lips.

"Ring, men, ring!" he shouted, as he came straight for her. "Ring, and we'll beat 'em yet!"

A cloud of sand followed on his words, blinding Chrystal in the instant that she felt herself seized, but in no lover's clasp. Yells and shouts increased her bewilderment, some moments passed before she could clear her eyes sufficiently to see the cavern filled with wild struggling figures, and herself borne in Esmé's arms, the centre of the small circle of his men, their swords out. The wreckers, four to their one, were on them, opposing steel with sand, dense blinding showers, enabling fierce rushes of the foe with the object of breaking the living ring. Sand blinded, yet steel bit, and the ring held firm in steady progress up the cave, more than one red stain on the ground marking points scored to the Few in the bewildering unequal warfare.

But the Many dogged the Few close, and the cave was long. Chrystal, gripped in the hold that a common plight had rendered sexless, had time for many a shuddering vision of some blind-alley where death, at the hands or by slow siege of the man-eating wreckers of Auldham, would be sole outlet. The sword-thrusts and the sand-showers, the frantic rushes and the onward step, were repeated to monotony, and still there was no break of the ring, or no end to the cave.

A gorse-scented wind smote Chrystal in the face,—a shout from the men about her leapt out to meet it. Light, green through bushes, met the eyes raised in quick search for the wind-sown hope, the ring broke. Forming in a wedge the Few burst through the opening on the hillside, then the ring closed again, with those reddened swords out like thirsty tongues of death-hounds. Chrystal, dropped by Esme on the turf, saw him leap back to take his place among the waiting swords, saw him cut down the first wretch of the Many, loth even then to relinquish the Few of which they had made sure. The swords were redder before the Many were beaten off, leaving the victory and the hillside to the Few.

The fight and his long fast had wrought a certain sobering of Esmé's mood, when, under the sky widening with sunset light, he and his men found it safe to shape course for the nearest seaport. Chrystal recognised a reprieve with thankfulness, but a reprieve depending only on Dare-the-Deil's wind-will, left untouched the root of the anguish in her, as the lulls between spasms of bodily suffering seem merely to lend strength to each succeeding throe. The convulsive trembling of her every fibre and the wanness of the delicate face appealed even to the men among whom she moved a prisoner, no word or look added to the deadly fear oppressing her, making her turn with loathing from the food so sorely needed by her, and which, however roughly prepared over a fire of sticks, could have been relished at another time.

Dare-the-Deil Hope ate his supper, but he held himself moodily aloof from the rough kindness of his followers, shown by the plover's eggs brought to Chrystal by one more sharp-sighted than his fellows, or by the milk which the man reputed to have as many murders as fingers on his hands, had left his own meal unfinished to procure from some shepherd's hut, divined by the campaigning instinct. No word, black, white, or grey, was to be had from the young chief over the forming of a screen of withies and heather, behind which Chrystal might withdraw

for the night, but the modest green shelter might have been a beacon-light, so persistently through the rainy darkness did it draw the eyes of the man who had chosen to watch while the rest slept. Esmé walked the darkness down, circling mothwise about the screen that opposed his desires with so frail a barrier, but though the circle of his paces narrowed increasingly, something stronger than the withies withheld him from freeing them.

The day was almost there when the restless watcher stopped short, and now close beside the screen. A voice thrilled him, the voice which through the night had sounded to him, but no longer broken with the sobs of a woman's misery. Stealthily the watcher drew near and nearer, till he could see the girl whose presence the night long he had felt neighbouring him, facing on her knees what the light might bring her.

"Thy Will, not mine!" and *"I prayed to be saved from Sandy, and Thou didst it by giving me over to Esmé!"* So much the watcher heard before the faint gasps sank out of earshot, broken words only audible at times. *"O God, think on Thy lamb—let me not come to harm through the lad—my father's prayers for him must stand—what Thou willest, but Thou canst not will harm—and Esmé and I played together!"*

The rapt sentences were interrupted. The girl bred up by a mystic father, turned at a footstep, the exaltation fading from her face, to find Esme on his knees beside her, ready to devour her hands with kisses.

"Skewer me!" he cried, "if I'm not your dog from this day on! Guard you and fight for you, you marmouset saint, ay will I! but I give you leave to cut my liver out with your bodkin, if I so much as walk by your side without your liking, till the day—what! stranger ones have dawned on this wise old world that knows there's no weathercock like a woman's heart—when you see fit to beckon me as the best lover that ever wore manskin! There,

box me not, pretty petticoat," as Chrystal, carnal indignation stirring through her mood, tried to free her hostage-hands, "'tis no sin to be a woman, and that's all my soothsaying means' Opportunity is the mould that marriage is made in, and the lover with you through the days of wandering to be weathered before we can reach a seaport, must be a dull Jack to his trade if in the end on't he does not play cuckoo to the lover now squatted cosy in a little heart, but who, 'tis like, will never clap his squint on that bonny face again' But till the cuckoo has fairly cheeped 'Yo, heave-ho!' in that heart, my dove, trust me, you were never safer in your mother's lap than out on the Ochils with Esme Hope and his men!'"

He sprang to his feet, to confront his approaching followers

"Look you, men!" he shouted, "I call on you to hold my kinswoman, Mistress Chrystal Hope, in all honour as lady and queen of us!" He threw his gold chain and whistle about the girl's neck "The first blast on yon whistle will blow the man who lightlies her by so much as a look off this world and into the next, and so much is sure as any preacher's text ever set by congregation to the music of snores!"

Chrystal had a smile for the concession relieving her of a torturing dread, though it made plain that Esmé had not resigned his purpose of winning her for his wife. The possibility of her will's disloyalty to the man with the sombre eyes and the first word of love still to speak, at times made her heart hot within her during that strange wild week of wandering that came with the little party setting face inland, though at others depression would bid her see no possible finish to the adventure than a ship with sails set and a French wind. Yet, with the sound gipsy-life making soul and body strong, it was as if the dark forebodings lost the pateran of the girl errant on the hillsides, and were frequently outstripped by her, the "long thoughts of youth" with hope for their leaping-staff clearing all obstacles of the present to make excursions into the future, Land of Promise

as such pilgrims deem it. There were mornings in sunny straths, with the smoke of the camp's wood-fire acrid on the wind balsamic with gorse, pine, and birch, with perhaps a stag standing in the pride of his ten out against the sky on a boss of rock to the right or left, and magpies darting in pied motley through the timber, when Chrystal knew that Gordon and she would meet again, that no shadow of disloyalty or wavering would trouble the meeting, that he would ask and she would give as if the world held no others but themselves. And yet there were sad rainy evenings, when a wet wind sighed like a remorse through the trees, and the screes of stones and gravel lent further desolation to the rainswept corry where the little band must cower till daylight. At such times Chrystal would stray apart from the encampment down towards some little tarn with the wild herons a-fishing in its slate-grey waters, and its *hush-hush* to the mountain, like a whisper of soothing to some great couchant creature, liable to strange outbursts. Or the restless steps would press on and up, through wet undergrowth and mists rolling low, to the crest of the pass or balloch overhanging, where the girl might weep her heart out in the falling rain, and be uplifted thereafter by the clouds drifting overnead, but passing, passing steadily, and their worst done.

It was after a rain-filled day that Chrystal roused herself from such weeping to welcome a gleam of sunshine as an omen. The Hopes had been wandering by the lip of Loch Leven through the last hours, not in the best of humours to find that the journey of the day before had overshot the track making for St Andrews, the port where Esme hoped to take ship from the country increasingly dangerous for a man broken out of prison to persist in. Chrystal's ears were weary of the snarlings of the company, she made haste to steal away from the supper-fire to wander up the meadowy strath to the yeasty foaming of Devon River among the cliffs worn and hollowed by the centuries of their quarrel with the

torrent The wild water, shattering itself in its leap over the rocks presumptuously seeking to bridle it, let no choking sob of the weeper among the trees green with spray go forth to set officious comforters on the trail, the solitude strengthened Chrystal, when, her tears wept out, she found herself still free to follow the path The day had wept itself out also Broken rainbows had come to jewel the white flashing fall with gems, as soon as made, cast away by the impetuous water flinging itself in the leap that would bring it to the widenings and fair flowings through the pleasant champaign-distance beyond

Climbing through the dripping trees, a lichen-enamelled rock offered a seat, with a view below of the cataract, above of the linn filling and overflowing the cavities of the water-worn stones A carillon of belated harebells drooped their blue bells in their belfry of a crevice, the sight of the diaphanous flower-heads set Chrystal once more on the Burghmuir, where she had made a path of such blue blossoms for a man with tawny hair and eyes to find her at the end of it With the girlish heart-lightening which the relief of tears brings in its train, "clear shining after rain," she had been singing as she followed the hill-path, ballads musical to her perhaps for a name in them—of gallant Glenlogie who had nothing to return for a lass of Gordon's fancy in her heyday, but who was moved to pity and love when the young beauty fell into her wasting sickness of disappointed hope The girl-mouth was still adroop in its curves for that other Gordon of Brackley, with the loyal farewell kiss for the false wife hounding forth him to "ride out who would never ride hame," but it dimpled into a smile at the thought that a descendant of his would never have gone down in verse as such a Love's martyr, that the wife scornfully taunting him to "go milk the ewes" would have been taught her place, till she had had no doubt left in her that she "had married a man" Thinking of bitter speeches that nevertheless smacked of secret pain, of the flashing smile that leapt forth unexpectedly at petul-

ance, the sweet lips began once more to chime out words half-unconsciously, the memory of a flowering cherry-tree and a girl beneath looking and listening for the one,—to meet whom she had outpaced the dawn,—coming in refrain—

*O the world is wide and the road is long, and am weary o' my quest !
For as I came over the moor this morn my heart leapt from my breast !
" Eh, my gallant sir, tell me true and true, if a heart ye've chanced
to meet,
For I've follow'd fast, and I've follow'd far, but a girl's heart outruns
her feet ! "*

*" O hold back a wee in your chase, my may, or ye'se win a wicked pain,
For a lass 'tis ill should a heart once lost, take the homeward road again,
If ye lose a heart, ye may find a heart, but back may yours never fleet !
'Twould be sear'd and dry since the young, fresh morn when the girl's
heart outran her feet ! "*

" O am wae to hear't, my gallant sir, and am lonesome for a heart ! "
*" O fie, bonny may, when ye've nested in mine, and from it ye will not part !
But I've found your heart as I rode the moor, and I'll keep't to pay your
cheat !
Where it beckons you, come, to your place, my may, and a girl's heart
outruns her feet ! "*

" What matter, so they both win to the right place ? "

Weaving her rough rhymes, Chrystal had not heard a footfall for the commotion of the linn. She leapt up, to stand face to face with Adam Gordon.

" You ! "

" And you ! "

The tawny eyes were sad no longer, they were golden in the brilliant confident smile.

" Put a name to your gallant of the moor, Chrystal ! " he commanded. " Will Gordon of Brackley fit the rhyme, my may ? for his is the heart you've found. Try it, lass, say it, bonnibell ! or stop, Adam would have a softer sound to me from your lips. Let me hear Adam for my welcome-word, and then if you mislike the ring of it I can kiss it away ! "

" The kisses are not come to their growth, to match wi' your hair, sir ! " quoth Chrystal demurely. Gordon put up an instinctive hand to the burnished lock shorter than its fellows.

"Zounds! how came you to hear of my Vow of the Lovelock?"

"Well for you that I did, or mayhap you would not find me lending ears to your talk of kisses and clavers!" Chrystal's happy eyes refused the meeting with his. "Had you not broken in on my lilt, you might have heard there was another verse to it."

"And another name, Chrystal? Should I have heard that?"

"Eh, sir, what's in a name? Ye'll mind your Wisdom of Women,—*so the ring is on, fient cares she who puts it!*"

He stared at her, perplexed

"Is yon the word you have for me, child? At least, the name?"

"I would not trouble you with my affairs, sir. As you asked once, *What is't to me who weds you?*"

His look lingered on her face

"A truce to flouting! Chrystal, have you indeed no need of me? by those eyes, you have wept to-day?"

"So do the crocodiles! And in your Book of Wisdom you have learnt,—*Women and crocodiles are some sib!*"

The arrows, feathered by dainty malice, stung The eyes steadfastly on hers overgloomed

"You would be kinder did you know how my wisdom of women was learned me," he said slowly

"A woman it was who stained my honour, who made me in the seeming a coward in the Cause I was vowed to, a traitor to my master and my friend. Yet so much at least have I to thank for, that your lesson to me has been of another sort, *that there are women can be brave and true as men!*"

The grey eyes were lifted quickly at that—To see Esmé Hope at the turn of the path

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" shouted he, "here's a fine awakening! The lass that I deemed so mum and maidenly, with yon whistle round her neck to sound for help should a man get off his knees before her, holds tryst with the Cavalier whom cart-ropes could not keep to court his gilpy in Embro', lest his honour

should suffer—by getting the worst of it in the fair fight I offered him! 'Swoons, mistress, I'll wager 'twas some jockery-pookery of yours among my men, that has laid us off the scent these two days past, when but for that we should have been at St Andrews by now, instead of squatting on our hurdies while you forgathered wi' the gallant who was not afraid of a wet down-lying in the woods of Cawdron Linn!'

"Another word, and you'll find a wetter down-lying in the waters of Cawdron Linn," interrupted Gordon sternly. "Quarrel, if you will, with a man with steel at his side, not with a lass who cannot give you the coward's blow for your blasphemies of her white innocence!"

Esmé glared at him sullenly.

"Fight for her then!" he cried, stammering a little in the rage that shook him like an ague. "For the sake of the time you stood to me like a man, I'll give you once more to practise that flanconade of yours, you'll need it to counter the fiends' pitchforks wi' in the quarters where any other mortal who minted at giving coward's blow to Esmé Hope would have fared to quicker!" He laughed hoarsely. "D'ye need a whet to your steel, sir? Here's for you, then!"

He had twisted a green-tasselled spray from a larch-tree, flicking it wickedly over Chrystal's cheek. In the same instant the man with the tawny eyes was on him, swinging him off his legs over the chaldron, boiling feet below.

"Take your choice, between your knees to ask her pardon, or your chucking like a mangy cur into yon pool!" he commanded, in a voice that, low as it was, penetrated through the water-noise.

"Eh, let him up!" Chrystal's cry, touched with scorn, was at his ear. "Let him up, 'tis but wearying your sword-arm for nought, one would not drown an ill-conditioned cur for snapping at heels, 'tis the little dogs' way! Nay, sir!" as Esmé, purple and spluttering, was landed on his feet, "no apologies!"

At sight of the whip, curs are aye ready to fawn where they have snarled, but I would not be fyled by their tongues ! ”

The tawny eyes came on her, appreciative of the mettled spirit that transfigured the dainty creature into the bearing of an insulted queen.

“ You hear, sir ? At my lady’s bidding, you are spared the drookin’, but I am not minded that you should go scot-free ! On guard with you ! ”

Esme tore off his sea-stained doublet, with Chrystal’s careful darnings repairing the damage of wayside thorns.

“ Come on then ! ” he cried thickly “ And when the ploy’s over, you shall watch, tied to yon tree, the Taming, wi’ a switch from it, of the Shrew ! ”

Gordon let the taunt pass. With eyes hard as cairngorms he was watching Hope’s circlings, his finger-play light on his own hilt as a fiddler draws the bow in anticipations over the strings. For the first he merely stood on the defence, parrying with the left, then a strong rapid movement on Esmé’s part, calculated to get in on his adversary’s right hip, was foiled, by a scrape in tierce, driving the attacking blade out of line. With vigorous guiding fingers, the pupil of Besnard of Rennes slid his steel down, down from *faible* to *forte*,—a clinging riposte and thrust barely frustrating his tactics.

Esmé’s hair grew wet. The wicked opponent rapier was *rusé*, it yielded like a bulrush from the river, it thrust like a lance. His deadly *riposte du tac-au-tac* had been parried in *quarte* with incredible swiftness, in the moment of regaining position a lunge had been aimed by a straight arm, before which he had nearly broken ground.

The swollen veins on the Hope’s temples throbbed as a lykewake dirge. The arm that held the blade humming about him like a bloodsucker must be strained still from swinging his weight out over river Devon, the thought made the energetic attacks the more invincible to him, by inspiring a superstitious fear as of some supernatural strength. He dis-

engaged, frustrated, but the singing sword would not be beaten off, it lunged suddenly, fiercely on him, not disarming, but attacking blade and body in one

Chrystal had watched the match silently. A red weal on her cheek showed where Esmé had struck at her, her bosom still panted with the anger that had swept down on her under his insults. Clear Havens' teachings for the moment forgotten, she stood carnally satisfied to see the insolent boaster taught a lesson, the first assaults were followed by eyes that glittered like the crossing blades. But with the growing fear in Esme's face, the sweet magnanimity that was part of the girl revived. Putting aside the revenge that the blood in her was too vivid not to desire, she in the instant of Gordon's fatal flankade, had flung herself forward, beating the blades down with her soft hands.

"Shame on ye, men!" she cried. "What make of Christian men is it to fight like stags in spring, and a mate, will she, won't she, to fall to the strongest? What dreams would visit you in the bride-bed red with blood? what luck would come with the bride, think you, lifted into the new life over the threshold-stone of murder? Am not a bone to be wrangled over by dogs?" she went on with increasing passion, "but a maid wi' her woman's right o' choice!" And—I choose!"

The passionate voice broke with her pause, carnation red, eyes adroop, she turned to Adam, holding out the hand on which blood-drops had started. The eyes that had gleamed gem-hard kindled into fire as he took it with a reverent touch, his sword dropping unheeded to the mosses.

"I shall know how to keep what you have given!" he said quietly.

Esmé, breathing hard, wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"Faith! the choice was made before now!" he cried maliciously. "'Twould seem to be Embro' fashions to give what's not been asked for, so glib

has my lady been with her prating of the man she's hung her heart on, and the love bred by him in her sweet self ! ”

The quick meeting of the lovers' eyes increased the ill-humour in him

“ You're geyan confident, my Lovers of the Linn ! ” he drawled “ But what's to hinder my putting a spoke in this jolly Romaunt of the Wildwood, with a word whispered in the ear of the nearest justice, touching a lass seduced from the ward of her lawful guardian ? ”

“ Only that the worthy justice might chance to put a question or two that a man broken out of prison might find hard to answer,” returned Gordon tranquilly Hope's scowl grew heavier

“ I vow I have as much good mind as ever huntsman to lay on hounds to whistle my men up on you ! ” he muttered gloomily “ 'Twould be good sport to form a ring and set you to fight with each in turn, till the one with the parry for your deil's flankonade was found ! ”

Gordon laid hold of the whistle about Chrystal's neck

“ Shall I blow ? ” he demanded carelessly

Chrystal snatched it from his hand

“ If ye so blacked the Hope name with such a deed as yon, Esme,” she cried, “ come soon, come late, I myself would delate you to that justice ye speak of, and never rest till you were hanged high as Haman ! ” The dainty head was flung back scornfully “ Is it now that a Hope needs to be taught to take the fortunes of wai wi' a grace, when 'twas you yourself in Greyfriars Kirkyard first gave the challenge to the man who's fought ye and bested ye ! ”

Her scorn on his honour, seemed to wake Esmé from his brooding He laughed harshly

“ By token that I was a fool not to take when it lay to my hand, I deserve to be trounced,” he said “ But I'll match my paiks with a kiss before I go ! ”

The flash in Chrystal's eyes answered that in his

She stooped lithely, to catch up the sword at her feet

"Blood will flow ere you get that kiss!" she cried dangerously

For as long as one might keep unswallowed a mouthful of water, Esmé stood still, confronting her. His fierce blue eyes devoured her pretty attitude of defiance, the gold curls framing the sweet flushed face, the grey eyes, the pouting of the "bee-stung" lower lip. Without a look to Gordon, without a word he turned then, striding down through the wet woods holding the sides of Devon River

Chrystal, left behind, felt a strange shyness come upon her. The grey eyes had taken sanctuary under their lashes, but she knew Gordon's look keen on her, that a smile was on his lips. It was a relief when he spoke at last, in the frank tone that had grown familiar

"'Tis a bodement of fortune to my errand, that I should have found the one of all others who can help me best and she will!" he said. "A word dropped by a stray masterless man on my road two days back of clansmen walking the world with a maid in their midst, turned me on a chance, but I had never offered sacrifice to Goddess Luck that I could count on her befriending me thus! What say you, Chrystal," he bent to question the shy eyes, "will you give me your help in my business?"

She dared a glance. "As comrades must!"

"No comrade!" He had grasped her hand. "With that touch of your lips in the Stinking Close, I kissed farewell to comrades. Leave comradeship to men, bonnibell, and be you the woman who loves me as I her!"

As an old wound wakes and stings, the memory of the pain and shame brought by the morning on the Burghmuir woke stingingly in Chrystal. The blushes which her enforced choice had cost her still burnt in her cheeks, but in spite of them, feminine pride vowed that the gallant, no longer of the Two Hearts, should not come to his own so easily, not

a second time would Chrystal of Clear Havens be willing, to undergo her woman's right of courtship. This confident Cavalier who had twice bent her to his will should spell out the lesson *He who will not when he may!*

"If, as I was told but lately, that there's no weather-cock like a woman's heart, a man's will is the wind to it!" The retort was tucksy-demure. "Blow hot, blow cold, but the wind on the Burghmuir blew from another airt!"

"The cuckoo-storm then, gales that bring spring!" Gordon responded. "For that breeze on the Burghmuir blew the seed into the Cupid's furrow of my heart, and the winter of my discontent is past! The seed is not less firmly rooted for what must seem a speedy flowering, between the Burghmuir and Leith Roads lay a full time of testing the growth." The glancing smile broke out. "Mayhap I had not known the want of you but by wanting you through those weeks—the fear I had lost you teaching me what joy would lie in finding you!"

Her look was provocative, mischievous, a challenge.

"'Tis why you turned upon your road, trow? Chrystal Hope, or Chrystal's help—which?"

"The thought of Chrystal's help headed me back," Gordon avowed coolly. "The other thought has been my journey-fellow, flitting beside me over hill and dale, through day and dark, never playing the deserter even in my dreams!"

"By token that dreams go by contraries, 'tis Chrystal's help will indeed go with you!" The girl from whom a man had asked nothing but comradeship on the Burghmuir, would hold him to his bargain here by Cawdron Linn. "To save myself from Dare-the-Deil, I must needs go with you, and 'tis but fair that I should do my endeavour to help you in the business you munt at!"

Instinctively she had moved with him, striking into a path leading from the river. Gordon stood still beside a hawthorn-brake, each thornpoint buttoned with a watereidrop.

"Hand, and not heart, is all that is ready for me then," he said with grave courtesy "Be it so, and fear not that I will again ask for more than you are minded to give"

He moved on as he spoke To the ears of the girl, suddenly conscious of weariness, his voice mingled dreamily with the squeaking of the bats, and the chuckling cry of the great white owl settling to the hunt through the darkening night

"Ere I take your help, you must know how matters stand," he began afresh, brusquely as was his wont "You shall act no longer blindfold in business of mine, as you did—leal comrade that you were—in the matter of the key that Montrose had charged himself to convey to the King—that he, and not the Parliament, should have access to his own crown!" Chrystal's start was not heeded by him "Yon key that you put into my hand unlocked more doors than one to me, and first and foremost, that of the house we wot of on the Flodden-Wall, the house which, more truly than the black castle, could bear the King's standard, since it belongs to Lochiel, hot for the Stewart, as long training in Argyle's false ways has made him by the teaching of contrast! Black Evan, as they of the Highlands call him, has been more than once in Embro' of late, concerting with the Absolute Loyalists—those who have learnt to jouk to the storm, till things are ripe to put the Prisoner of the Parliament at the head of a party of his own Our plan is at the birth, the next days, with Dame Luck for the howdie, will bring it forth!"

"And your part in the plan?"—

The pair had come to a stand on a patch of ground ghostly in the darkness, with the white stars of the grass of Parnassus growing thick in the wet place Gordon's answer was no louder than the trickle of a runlet down among the grasses and the white flowers

"I am on my way to Dunnottar Castle, to take, if the thing's to be done, the Regalia from the place

where the Committee of Estates laid it up as the strongest in the kingdom ! ”

“ Eh, sir ! ” Chrystal’s gesture was that of one blinded by light “ The door that opened when by chance I spoke the word *honours*, as to you the night before ! ”

“ Your first arrow’s in the white ! With the crown and the King in Royalist hands, with the army already half won over to the Stewart, though they have no more than seen him, with the clans mustering to the gathering-place Lochiel will afford us in the Highlands, think you not that the Engagers will take courage to *join* what they would not *begin*—that our hand will be strong enough to force the Parliament to throw in their lot with us, rather than that Cromwell should make his profit by the ‘ divided house ’ ? ” A bitterness tinged the hushed triumph in his voice “ Mayhap when a jade’s spite and hate kept me from fighting and falling in the Marquess’ dash, she did our side better service than she guessed, keeping me obscure and therefore the safer to move through Scotland, ringing men on the counter of action to test them true for the Cause ! ”

The summer night was cresting its darkest hour, yet the girl, herself oppressed with vague indefinable unhappiness, raised her head wistfully at the pain thrilling the voice at her side

“ Could I have word, but for one moment, with *him that’s away* ! ” it muttered in passionate reverie “ ’Tis past me to understand how a fear of ghosts has come on the race of men, who must each and all know the craving for once, but for once, to be granted glimpse of ghost or spirit or whatever shape clothes those who have shed the flesh that locks us away from them ! One word to tell the master that I was not the craven I may well have seemed, that I was absent from his side at Invercharron, at the gallows-tree, through treachery that was none of mine ! ”

“ Sir, the word’s not needed ! ” Chrystal forgot the indifference of her chosen part in a rush of sweet

sympathy "Have you forgotten that the Marquess saw ye at the last, that he smiled to the one man in all the gathering with heart enough to be his champion?"

"I have not forgotten how a lass cared to bring comfort to a dour, heartsore man!" Gordon answered briefly. A shiver running over the slight figure beside him, seemed divined by him through the darkness.

"You are forfaughten!" he exclaimed, with a remorse in his voice. "Over-travelled and weary!—and I have nought better than words to give you in this desert where the night is churl enough to deny us so much as a shepherd's cot. Well, sleep at least is a ware to be found in every traveller's pack—be it of the poorest and lightest—so to sleep with you, before we take another step together in plan or path!"

Groping here and there while he talked, he found what he sought, in the shape of a bank dense with bracken and broom, shelving up from the track into which the wanderers had struck, when the wood had fallen back. Chrystal submitted to be wrapped in her companion's cloak and laid down on the green bed which a cut or two of his sword had heaped up, under another armful of the spicy growth she lay listening to the retreating footsteps of the man who had served her where he could, and thereafter left her, bidding her sleep sound.

His matter-of-fact acceptance of the situation forged by herself chafed Chrystal's mood, but the sense of security in the neighbourhood of the one man of her world so full of men, worked soothing stronger than the scents or whispers of the hill. Scarcely taking more thought for the morrow than birdie in nest, she slept, never starting or stirring till the crackle of a fire woke her to the sunlight and a certain sense of happiness, which the smoke on the wind, as she had smelt it every morning of her wanderings, seemed to tell her was no more than a dream of the night. Reluctantly she raised herself on

her fragrant couch, but at the sight of a pair of flashing eyes smiling a good-morrow to her, she rose, shaking off the cloak which had kept her cosy

Gordon, a bunch of the Parnassus grass in his hand, sprang up the bank with a smile, for which Chrystal paid with blushes

"Didst sleep well in the old green room with the blue curtains?" he asked, holding out the flowers "See, these *white girls*, as Master Herrick would sing blossoms delicate and fair as these, have a greeting for their little sister"

His ease of good breeding chaimed shyness from the girl, errant with him in the wildwood Sitting together on the heather, over the breakfast of pigeons spitted and roasted above the fire fanned by the light summer wind, the talk never flagged, the man's face lightening or glooming at the girl's story of adventures and perils, through which only her brave innocence had floated her unscathed Chrystal's heart pattered quicker as she fancied, he, as well as herself, was reluctant to break up the sitting, when a glance at the sun had made the move imperative He, as well as she, cast a backward glance as they turned away from the resting-place of a summer night, with the embers of their fire still red as the passion-rose that but once in a lifetime opens to its bloom in a human heart

"To business, sir!" Chrystal spoke the more gaily for that glance from eyes tawny, intercepted by her "Now comes the time to show me my share in your errand at Dunnottar!"

A singular mixture of eagerness and reluctance was to be read in Gordon's manner

"You masked as an old wife once to escape from that unwhipt boy, your kinsman Jock! Have you spirit for the part again?" he said at last Chrystal looked her answering question

"Is it in you, think you, to play the part of Lady Keith, descending on her son's, the Earl Marischal, castle in a surprise-visit, that she may see for herself the mice are not at play though the cat's away?"

Gordon's smile was powerless to hide anxiety "I have learnt that the old dame has not set foot in Dunnottar for a score of years, so that her person is unknown to Barras as to the castle-memie, and, for the rest, that she is of little stature and a high temper, grey eyes, and a tongue like a mill on a windy day What's your mind? will you risk personating her or no'?"

"I have fooled all the household at Clear Havens under the guise of the old Leddy of Bothwell, and her own woman there thinking nothing less than 'twas her mistress herself'" returned Chrystal thoughtfully

CHAPTER XVIII

ON THE SHORE OF TAY

"THINK well, child! I, as your steward or what not, will of course be with you, but the burden of the business must fall on you" Adam's voice had an intonation like a caress in it "'Tis token that the plan is by a man, that a woman should bear the brunt of it, is it not? But sooth, Chrystal, since yon gaberlunzie gave me the notion that you were out of Edinburgh, I felt that you, and you alone, were the one for this strait!'"

That unreasonable jealousy of herself leapt awake in the girl, making the help which, by her own word, she stood pledged to give, a fetter rather than a link, binding her to this man, to whom nevertheless she had refused to be bound by any closer ties. Gordon appeared to be in no haste for her decision, appeared indifferent also to that other decision, secretly but heartily repented by Chrystal already, and evermore keenly through the summer day on the heather, which might have been delectable, where now it was purely tantalising. Some dim recollection of a tapestry in Leddy Bothwell's dwelling haunted the girlish fancy,—a castle of sleeping Love, set about with guardian hedge of briar-roses. Rose-sweet, but thorn-sharp, were the hours of companionship with the man who, Chrystal told herself, cared so much for his purpose that he was willing to buy an instrument needed for it with marriage—was nothing less for it, but who cared so little for the wife he had been willing to wed that her refusal to be no more than instrument, had brought a content to his face which Chrystal had never heretofore seen

in it Wicked are the thorns of the Rose of Love
Chrystal went smarting that day

Yet seventeen, with sunshine on the heather and the man of men keeping step, cannot be drowned in the dismal The dwellers in the broom-thatched huts, who set their hospitality of minched venison, brandy, and whey before the wayfarers, looked with kindly curiosity at man and maid, laughing and talking together with the confidence of two children At intervals Chrystal was blithe, and felt as though the intimate relations in which for the present she found herself, had always existed between her and the tall figure who bore himself as though he were maintaining old fellowship, not establishing new, the kinship of spirit, thicker than blood, making itself known in flitting touches of resemblance in ways of thought or action Where such kinship, magnetic as amber, exists, the coming together needs no prelude of formality, instinctive, imperative, it defies Time, an hour accomplishing what a year would fail to consummate between souls farther apart

The radiant day had turned downhill, when Gordon came to a pause beside the shifting green and silver of a birch grove To-day's wandering journey was no such aimless sleutherings as those of the Hopes had been Pressing a pony of the race of Come-carry-me into Chrystal's service, they had worked way rapidly over a haunch of the Ochils towards the Tay, but now Gordon stood still, his look searching, Chrystal guessed, for the river that lay between them and Dundee Involuntarily, with the business-like sobering of his face, depression flowed back on the girl The day in which she and he had been all in all to each other on the heather, was almost done, the clouds of a morrow with no other prospects than a hazardous adventure and a necessary farewell, were already rolling up on the horizon A maiden all forlorn bit her lip over the imp of ill-luck begotten between masculine and feminine pride She had refused what she would fain have taken, he had vowed never again to ask it By the answer

won on the Burghmuir, by the kiss won in the Stinking Close, Chrystal knew that here was a man would keep word

A movement among the trees brought her thoughts back from penitential pilgrimage into past and future. Through the play of the birch-leaves, Chrystal perceived a company of deer breaking into the open, their stag shaking a shower of glistening drops from his dewlaps as he winded the humans.

"They'll be come up from the watering!" she whispered to the man, whose hand rested on the pony's crest.

The deer's breaking-up startled the squirrels over the tree-trunks, and the badgers, sitting up brunn-wise before their earths, from the watch maintained on the bunnies feeding and frisking in the evening-cool, with long stupid ears that told them nothing of the enemy, about to take the warpath that leads to rabbit for supper. The man's feet and the sheltie's hoofs trampled down the clans of green shoots about their chieftain-trees, in a spurt that brought man and beast into speedy sight of a broad water, grey and untracked as the stretch of sky from which the harvester Night had carried the golden sheaves of the long sunny day. Adam surveyed it with a gesture of impatience.

"*Peste!* we've struck it lower than I meant to come on it!" he muttered. "We must along the shore, bonnibell, our chance of crossing to-night lies in scaring up one of the pearl-fishers who ply their trade in these waters."

He sent out a shout before which the wild-ducks flapped up from the sedges, to a stooping figure with bare legs swathed in rushes, and with an osier-creel slung from his neck. Shy as the ducks, he seemed inclined to take flight like them.

"A ford! No ford!" he denied Adam's demand, before Chrystal's soft question as to boats woke fuller interest.

"Is yon your wife or sister, man?" he asked abruptly of Gordon.

"Is yon any of your business, man?" returned the Cavalier

"Ou ay! The King o' the Fishers here awa' tak's toll o' a' womenfolk wha haena drawn the coif ower the hair, an' a'm his man, ye ken"

"If you would live to be so longer, fellow, stand back and give us passage!"

Gordon's demand was answered by the wild-haired man's blast on an osier-pipe produced somewhere from his garments. A rustle followed it in the sedges and willows fringing the bank, from the grey-green growth a very tall man in a close-fitting suit of leather and a breastplate diapered curiously with mussel-shells and pearls, stepped out

"Who are ye who talk o' living and letting live in the Kingdom o' the Pearl-fisher King?" he asked, throwing the matted hair out of his eyes with the proud toss of the stag of the herd

Gordon looked keenly round. More than the evening wind was shaking the sedges, branches woven and plaited among the willows betrayed the whereabouts of a congeries of huts, the settlement roofs no doubt of the strange people among whom the travellers had fallen. As though the grey sedges were changing from an enchantment on them, grey forms of men were gathering silently from far and wide. He recognised himself overmatched

"Does the King of the Fishers make war on peaceful wayfarers?" he gave back the question. The giant, brandishing a pole with a barbed pitchfork in the end, came a step nearer

"What is the lass to ye?" he queried

For a moment that was at once long and short, Gordon looked in Chrystal's face. The dusk masked it, but the fingers came on his, fluttering, clinging

"*This is my wife!*"

"Ye'll swear to't?"

"I swear it! My wife now and for aye!"

At the words, the huge figure blocking the way fell back with lowered otter-pole

"Pass then! I have no quarrel wi' honest wives,

but syne the lass I was for weddin' was drowned on her marriage-morn, I tak' my toll o' the lave o' the snoods' " he returned in rough explanation

During the strange bridal, Chrystal had neither looked nor spoken. Silent and pale she sat her pony in the brown dusk, her heart going from her in one of those swift outreachings, that seek to grope through the Shadow for the dearest whose life has passed so utterly beyond the ken of the hearts yearning to them from the earth. Yet the daughter sick with craving for the vanished father, could not think that the love which had set her, his jewel, round, was a fleshly impulse to share the consuming of the grave, the strength of the love in herself was pawn sufficient that the love its counterpart was numbered among the things invisible that are the things eternal.

A dialogue between Gordon and the Fisher-King had ended in the production of a coracle of hide stretched over wickerwork. Chrystal submitted to be lifted from the sheltie, which, fastened by its headline to the craft, swam out sturdily behind it into the darkening river, across which a pearl-fisher had agreed to set the travellers. Gordon had wrapped her in the cloak that had been blanket of the previous night, the pressure of his arm was solicitous, but till the opposite shore had been reached, and the ferryman dismissed, no word was spoken. The pony was snorting and shaking off the wet, when Chrystal first felt her husband's lips on hers.

"You are not angered by your bridal on the shore of Tay, with yon whooping bittern for beadle, and the stars for marriage-torches? 'Twas the one way of protection open against yon masterless rogue of a Fisher-King, but—I will have no wife who comes not willingly to me' "

Kitten-mischief leapt up again in the creature, but a moment back wistfully sad.

"Nay, sir, what must be, must' " Chrystal made her surrender. "Blind Hughie saw right when he spied in the crystal a man tawny, putting the ring

on my middle-finger one striving against Fate is like to come by a fall ! ”

“ Fate me no fates, child ! We live in Christian times, here is no question of Fate, but of a woman’s will, and ”— Gordon paused before he added, “ her heart ! ”

“ Sooth ! I doubt I have none to give ! What then ? ”

The arm round her was gently withdrawn

“ Then will I bestow you in the keeping of an honourable lady of Dundee, and the adventure of Dunnottar once put through, wait at your leisure for a ‘ Yea ’ or ‘ Nay ’ ”

“ The honourable lady may air her sheets a day or two longer ! I would fain have a hand in fetching the King his crown ”

“ No, child, this day has shown me I cannot brook another such ! ” Gordon returned deliberately “ I must know you wife of mine—or nothing to me, a wife not won by the whim of a Fisher-King, but by love ! If not, then no wife, Chrystal, for I would never see your face again ! ”

A laugh, like the note of a bird

“ Eh, my man tawny, there’s nought for me to do then but to follow the heart I lost the day I rode out from Clear Havens ! ” a whisper followed the happy laugh The arm withdrawn a moment back, clasped the slim thing close, clasped to hold

Under the stars, they moved ahead, on to the light of Dundee glimmering before them, up to the black mass of the Law couchant above the town with its fortifications and their grim promise of welcome to the enemy whose ships might trespass in the broad estuary below The lights and the stars were outwatched by Chrystal’s eyes, before sleep came to her in the room of the inn in the Overgate, the nightcapped host of which had welcomed the guests with candles and a jorum of lambswool Esmé’s last long look, Sandy’s cunning air, Major Weir’s dark stare, haunted her brief sleep,

till she woke unrefreshed, but Gordon's eyes and smile were a charm against vague terrors when the pair sallied forth in the fresh-swept morning, to seek the religious sanction, wanting which, Clear Havens' daughter had confessed, she could not be wholly happy in her marriage. The forlorn dignity of the Old Steeple—keeping watch and ward over the town as since the day when the stones of its ruins were fresh from the tools of the master-builders—had for Chrystal the pathos of the mast over the wreck of some good ship, such as that which the ladies of the ballad, swaying the vigil-moments away with slow-moving fans, were never to see sailing to the strand with freight of a king's daughter from Norrøway. Gordon, however, seemed to have no interest in the stately Gothic tower, he walked fast, till under the gables of the Scouringburn, a little lean man in a rusty gown stepped out almost beside them, into the sunny street, leaving his house-door ajar. Adam made abrupt halt.

"By your favour, sir, you are minister of the Kirk?"

The wearer of the rusty cassock seemed alarmed at the challenge.

"What have you to say against my calling, sir?" he stammered. "It is sooth that I serve the Kirk o' Fowls Easter—six miles out to be jogged by my staff and me in order that the congregation may gather manna wi' no more swither to themselves than sitting still on their hindmost ends, but it has aye been mine endeavour to live and let live wi' all men, mixing my meal as I trust wi' no leaven o' Erastianism on the one hand, or flavour o' Socinianism on the other, if so a savoury cake may ensue therefrom, that may turn no weak brother's stomach! Forbye it is now a full year since I have budged in my Sabbath discourses from the genealogies o' Chronicles, all Scripture being profitable, but the marrow in those chapters pure from any smack of party spirit or capability o' application to a man's acquaintance, the whilk congregations are apt to do,

ilka body being aye readier to repent o' a neighbour's sins rather than his own ! ”

“ Nay, reverend sir, I am no chattering pie to meddle with the marrow in your dry bones ! ” Gordon assured him “ I would ask but a cast of your office to make two one ”

The little man moved his hands deprecatingly

“ Entreat me not, worthy gentleman, to make or mell in other men's pleas¹ He who tak's the trade o' peacemaker on himself may join two into one, but he is like to get his own fingers pinched shrewdly in the coming together ! ”

Gordon laughed outright

“ You take me up wrong, most reverend ! All I want of you is the wedding of me to this young gentlewoman to whom I am already handfast by a Scotch marriage ”

“ Eh, worse and worse ! ” cried he of the rusty gown “ No later than a saxmonth, Maister Seaton was for raddling my four bones or haling me before the Presbytery, for no other cause than a gang o' unhung rogues breaking in on me as I was about ganging till my bed and whirling me awa' in my nightcap to a house where a female in a mask—and no other than the Bailie Seaton's Effie behind it—waited to be married on the leader o' the crew ! Trowth ! the bailie's wrath thereanent when the business got wind has fairly scunnered me at marriages, though a' that I did was done wholly and solely to save scandal—and my night's sleep ! ”

“ That the bailie's wanting in this business I pledge you my honour, but wedded we must be before you sit down to your dinner,” Gordon checked his garrulity, with a firmness that took effect The minister groaned dismally and turned back to the door whence he had emerged

“ Weel-a-weel, better the marriage before the christening, since the thing buides to be ! ” he lamented, opening into a dusty parlour “ So to spare time, sir, on wi' ye, if ye will not think better o't, but wi'

¹ Quarrels

a sheepshead in the pot waiting on me, ye'll no' tak' it ill if I pare the prayer to consort wi' the provender, for prayer, ye ken, is no matter o' few minutes or many, while they just mak' a' the differ to the sheeps-head ! ”

The marriage, of the five-minutes order, was fairly accomplished, and man and wife stepped out once more into the Scouringburn. The girl spoke first, to combat a certain embarrassment

“Where next, now that the spell to turn Chrystal Hope into Chrystal Gordon has been spoken ? ”

“To a place I wot of, to turn the Dame of Brackley into the Countess Dowager of Keith,” responded Gordon slowly. “Bonniebell, it irks me that on our wedding-day's self I must run you into risk, but necessity drives ”

“And love spurs ! ” Chrystal whispered, turning with him as he plunged into a network of lanes seeming familiar to his speed

“Dundee is not so far from my parts of Deeside that I need to learn it at this time of day,” he said, guiding Chrystal onward. “And there are two-three souls here who will serve my purpose ”

Some half-hour's walking had brought them into the poorest quarters, where the dwellings clustered against a rising ground seemed little more than burrows. At one of the entrance-holes, Gordon stooped, to send a peculiar whistle into the interior

“Here's for the Trough ! ” he said, as a girl darted out of the hut's fastnesses. She stood back to give him entrance

Chrystal followed. The passage widened into a circular space hollowed in the hillside, and lighted by an oil-lamp swinging overhead in brass chains. The yellow flame made daylight on the place and its strange plenishing,—stuffed creatures of wood and field, dried herb-faggots, phials and implements of various shapes—heaped about the central figure of a grey-bearded old man, seated before a wooden trough, from the contemplation of which a pair of

hawk-fierce eyes were raised to strike, as it were, at the entering faces

"A tid-bit for the Trough, Duncan!" Gordon saluted him, answered as speakingly by the spark of satisfaction kindling in the unfaded eyes as by the Gaelic in which the response was made. The exchange of eagerly intoned sentences was ended by the grey-beard's rising from his seat, to draw Chrystal into the lamplight and scrutinise her with vivid glances

"Have no fear, bonnibell! The necromancer who, reversing Medea's spell, is to turn a young wife into an old one, will but see how his stains and paints may best effect his purpose," remarked Gordon reassuringly. The old man, turning to a recess in the wall, uttered another incomprehensible sentence

"You see one of the Children of the Trough before you," Adam translated it to Chrystal. "You'll have heard tell of the Slaying of Deeside, let loose on the Farquharsons by the Gordons in bloody vengeance for the murder of a Gordon of Brackley? James was king in Scotland then, and Duncan here was one of the two hundred children that day made orphans, whom the Marquess of Huntly of the time kept for a year and a day in the cellars of his "town" of Auchindown, and fed from the swine-trough with the castle refuse!"

The fierce-eyed man, bringing out handfuls of needments, pointed to the trough before his seat with an exultant exclamation

"Duncan says, *There's room in the Trough yet!*" Gordon took him up. "Lad of some ten years as was he then, he has never forgotten the debt of gratitude due to the House of Huntly for their hospitality. Had my mother not been sib to the Laird of Grant, who put an end to the Jest of the Trough by carrying the wretched orphans to his own castle, and having them bred up like Christians, no doubt I should have helped to fill the Trough after another fashion than now," he finished, repeating the last words in Gaelic to the old man listening

with a stern smile The latter spoke again in rapid deprecation

"*Kind is not kind* ! Duncan says, and says truth ' My branch has nought in common with the Covenanting Huntlys but a feud Alchemist, poticary, whatnot, 'tis long since Duncan let make this trough to keep aye in his sight lest memory of his grudge should die out with the generation of the Trough, hate rather than love it was that caused him to turn secret agent for Montrose, bitter foe of the Huntly 'Twas thus I fell in with him "

"And you can indeed trust him to keep faith with you, Gordon of Brackley though you are ? " Chrystal whispered

"Did you speak the Gaelic, Duncan would tell you—*Blood wipes out bloodstains* ! The Slaying of Deeside is in his eyes but fair vengeance for the slaughter of Brackley, but the insult of the Pig-trough is another matter, to be apaid to children and children's children That Aigyle — Gillespie Grumach as the Highlanders style him—is connected by a sister's marriage with the hated house, was a whet the more to make the Son of the Trough the Great Marquess' man, it was in going up and down the country on Montrose his errands that he learnt to turn the skill imparted to him by a gipsy herbalist of bygone days, to account in ticks of disguise, such as he stands awaiting to transfigure you with ' "

Chrystal inwardly shrank from the fierce old eyes, intent on the effect of paints and enamels under which the fair girl-face gradually took on an appearance of withered and furrowed eld The Gaelic spoken between him and Gordon seemed in character with the strangeness of the room, bearing, she guessed, a studied resemblance to the cellar, where the passion for revenge had struck ineradicable roots in the vindictive Highland heart Pondering over the savage jest, she started at Gordon's voice

"Our plot runs on wheels, my may ! Duncan's oe is fresh from the service of a foster-sister who, joining a Royalist husband in Holland, was forced

to leave her waiting-woman behind. Waiting-woman and groom of the chambers will form a sufficient tail for my Lady Keith, whom Duncan is ready to show you in his magic mirror ! ”

Chrystal gave a faint exclamation. The man Duncan had raised an old-fashioned brazen mirror, in the polished surface the face of a wrinkled old woman was reflected, faithful to a crow's foot, lips withered, temples sunken. The worker of the change spoke over his shoulder in doubtful inflections.

“Duncan questions, have you the voice to match the face ? ” her husband explained.

“Ay have I, but not the now ! ” Chrystal protested languidly. “The happenings of the last few days have so thronged on me, that head and hand, though not heart, are weary. No fear that I shall be found wanting when the hour comes, but it's no' here yet ! ”

“Then will I forth and order all things for our journeying. This evening must we break up, do you rest till then ! ”

The hawk-eyes watching took account of Chrystal's involuntary motion of shrinking. They softened as their owner spoke to her.

“The Highlander's salt is sacred ! ” Adam interpreted. “His threshold-stone is charmed against the four coupled hellhounds—Hatred, Jealousy, Fear, and Avarice—who go a-hunting on the track of man's blood ! ”

The young woman who had admitted them appeared at her grandfather's summons, receiving his directions with few tokens of surprise. Under her auspices Chrystal was installed in a smaller crypt, and invited to a sufficiently comfortable couch, on which in the soothing twilight she soon slept long and well. Her awakening was saluted by her new handmaiden offering a horn set in chased metal, filled with a liquid of a green translucence, a-quiver with the golden lights of bubbles beading the brim. In drowsy obedience to a sign, Chrystal drank, to feel almost instantly warmth and vigour coming to her stiff limbs, and a spring of activity inspiring her being.

Feather-light with the magical draught, she sprang to meet Gordon entering

"What, you've had a tasting of Duncan's Brew of Life?" he said "'Tis a secret like to die with himself, so jealous is he wellnigh of the light that sees his brewing, but in truth 'tis a right cordial, and would put life into a dead man could he get it over his thrapple. So, my may, art ready to 'Fare and fare forth,' as your Bordermen say, for supper waits for us on the table and our horses at the door?"

The strength of the cordial was with Chrystal, riding pillion-wise fast through the starlit night. The sheltie that had carried herself to Dundee had been handed over to the Farquharson girl, to whom the part of ledly's woman had been allotted, and the Highland damsel made no cavil at the pace that rode through the dark into the day. The salt wind had been about their faces through the black hours, but as the earth swung from its sleep into the sunlight, an exclamation broke from Chrystal at sight of blue-and-green fields of water stretching wide to the right, with tawny-sailed fishing-boats gliding over the shining floor, as in some stately dance, pavone or minuet. To the left, the land could rival the blues and greens of the sea by the purple and gold of heartsease flung like a king's mantle on the waste, while above, and around, the air—freest and strongest of the Three Great Sisters, Earth, Air, and Sea, weaving on their many-coloured loom—transmuted the blues and greens, the purple and gold, into sombre indigo and vivid emerald, into shadow and sunshine, on the headlands of red sandstone scrolling the coastline into the faint horizon.

Watching the annunciation of the day about to be born, the travellers had ridden some space in silence, when reminiscent dimples had broken the gravity in Chrystal's face. She turned to her husband, with the question often and vainly asked herself by herself, at last asked in words—

"What wrong had a woman put on ye, that in

the first you were all for flouting me, for no other fault than my petticoats ? ”

Gordon turned his look from the sky to the face illumined, it also, with the promise of a new day to be lived through together by them. His smile caught the reflection

“Bonniebell, when I fell in with you, the wounds a woman had dealt my honour were still green. ’Twas their smart made me light-headed enough to rail against all petticoat-folk, when I should have kept my curses for one, Jean Gordon ”

“The madam of the balcony ? ” Chrystal cried

“Ay, widow of the kinsman from whom I inherited—his lands and her hatred, that having no child, she should come by no more than her widow’s thuds. Her spite it was planned the false message that should discredit me with my party, by luring me to London before word of Montrose’s crossing from the Orkneys could reach me. Truly was I tricked, yet not so fully as she counted on, for a chance meeting with the one who had put the Marquess in possession of the key which I bear over my heart, dealt me the blow of knowing I had been cozened, but it salved the wound with the comfort that here was still a service I could render the Cause and *him*. For when *he*,” the tremor in the speaker’s voice touched the pronouns with sufficient sad significance, “received that which is the sesame to the strong-place of Dunnottar from the man sped to bear it to the owner thereof, but who turned aside instead to deliver it over to the Royalists, the Marquess concerted with him a signal by which—in event of misfortune and the key passing from his keeping—he should, if it might be his possible, indicate to whom it had gone. For the chance of a word, an instant with him, I rode night and day for Embro’, and you know how it fell out there with me ! ”

The old bitterness and a new softening strove together in Gordon’s face and voice, but the softening vanquished. The day’s travel was taken at the fastest, yet there were moments of speech and silence

that were eloquent, there were looks and smiles more eloquent still, there was a kiss or two that said most of all

Once only did the man's countenance regain its sombre cloud, when a chance word of Chrystal's had touched on their future should the Royalist plot prove successful, and the favour which his part in it would win for him at the court of King Charles

"I take no favour from King Charles!" he retorted quickly then "Gold, sweat, and blood, the King has a right to all of them from a Cavalier, but I'll never stain my hands by accepting aught from one with not pith enough in himself to stand by a friend in straits,—who let Montrose be done to death for no other crime than his loyalty,—who sought to take his own turn out of the murderers!" 'Tis well you should know it, bonnibell, in wedding me you've wedded a man who will bring you neither rank nor riches, but a heart where the scars of old wounds will fade only under the healing of kirkyard mould, and a temper of the worst, as I fear troubles have left it!"

"If you have neither rank nor riches to share wi' me, nothing's left for my marriage-portion but those same troubles!" Chrystal's hand stole on his "And I claim my share!"

Gordon surveyed her with glancing eyes

"Witchling, you have the trick of brewing a love-potion will work magic on temper and heart!" he ejaculated, the silence falling thereafter seeming sweet to both with its unsung songs of the future

The shadows on the headlands scarcely shifted as quickly as those on Chrystal's face, as the horses' hoofs beat out their journey on the anvil of the day. With the unrolling of the scroll of coastline she found herself shrinking, dreading unspeakably a failure that might lose her all, even to that strange new love with her new life in its womb, but no thought of faltering came with her tremblings. When in the afternoon, suddenly overcast with a weeping mist, black towers frowning from a boss of rock

took slow shape behind the mist, as though rising at incantation from the bubblings of a witch's chaldron, the great heart-leap that loosened her knees and sapped her breath was succeeded by an instant bracing of herself to action

"Dunnottar! Eagle and eyrie and the golden egg!"

Adam's whisper fell on deaf ears. The sun shining somewhere had struck the mist about the castle-rock, drawing a broad band of rolling iris on which the cresting towers now seemed to float, rooted on jewelled foundations

"As when a wean, I dreamed the rainbow the arch that spanned the entrance to Faery!" Chrystal murmured, with the horses striking into the steeps of the path that wound upon the fortalice

The bounding of the stones from under the climbing hoofs mingled with the wash of the tides that surged about two-thirds of the bossy rock, the dry chasm on the travellers' right divorcing it from the mainland, and showing a precipice depth to the climbers. The sadness of the sea and the grunts of the horses fretted Chrystal's tension, she was ready to welcome the voice ringing out of the lofty entrance-arch which a turn of the path flung them on suddenly at the last

"Who rides?"

"The Dowager Countess of Keith!"

With the challenge and answer, the die was thrown. A cracked female voice took up the word

"Ye loons! Shut door and uphung drawbridge! is yon the meet welcome for the mother o' the Yerl Marischal? Go fetch the Governor, I say, till I speir at him is't his pleasure that the Leddy Keith should be kept awaiting like a beggar-wife at her son's yett?"

A running to and fro among the men-at-arms about the gate answered the imperious appeal, in a haste powerless to stem the vigorous scolding

"Ma certes! The compliments o' the Dowager Countess to Barras, and bid him be sure to supper

himself and smoke a pipe or so of Virginia before he takes pain to give her entrance ' Haith ' the castle is under different orderin' than when my lord's father hung up the sentry on the two spears o's fellows, for no more than the daffin' wi' the armourer's lass in's watch ' "

" I was falconer's lad to the auld yerl, and never heard tell the like o' yon ' "

The alarming interruption came from an old white-bearded man who had tottered with the support of his staff to view the new-comers Chrystal turned on him

" Ay, man ! A'm in my dotage, ye're minting ' " she retrieved her false step with presence of mind " Bide till I get at ye, my hirplin' Methusaleh ' and I'll teach ye wi' this rung that I'm no' so far gone in years "—

The soldiers gave back from the inner gate pitted with shot-holes, before a grizzled moustache mustering the little cavalcade as he advanced

" I am in command of this castle, madam, at service Do you bring a token from the Earl Maishal ? "

" Token, man ! " The Leddy Bothwell in her warmest moments had shrieked on as shrill a note " What token is the minnie who bore him to bring from a son whuppet awa' to London town ? what token is the one who ruled as mistress here before you had cut your wisdom-teeth, to give that she may win to a night's lodging by the favour of a servitor ? Token quotha ! Straw and chains, if not a halter, will be token enough for ye that none but a madman would have lightled your lord's lady-mother, my man Barras ! "

The objurgations took effect Governor Barras had not ceased to scrutinise the tiny upright figure in the immense farthingale, the starched chemisette above the low-cut, long-waisted bodice, the beaver shovel-hat with its forest of plumes—costume made modish by Danish Anne, and adhered to, as all men knew, by the Dowager Countess in memory of her

youth The servitor with Keith double crest on breast and arm, the soberly clad waiting-woman, were irreproachable in fitness for a widow woman's household Ogilvie doubted no longer

"I cry you mercy, madam," he said, offering his fingers to escort her through the inner gateway "A Keith will find pardon for an over-carefulness in me for Keith belongings"

"Ay, the Yerl Marischal knows 'twas no Lord o' Misrule to whom he confided his strong-place of Dunnottar," responded his companion graciously With Major Weir's observation in mind, she walked shufflingly, putting weight on the ebony stick that, with a huge gilt-leather fan, completed the diessing of her part "To say truth, Barras, the pretext o' what my lord who's awa' aye called the housewife's beating up the outposts o' cellar and kitchen, will serve well enough for the lave, but in your ear, my errand is of a different complexion"

"You will first untire yourself, madam, and partake of a four hours?" the Governor, visibly unimpressed by an old woman's mysteries, urged politely The clutch of the small hand in its gauntlet on his arm tightened

"Barras, there was a key that was lost and found!"

The soldier's look and words, one startled, the other cool, did not match

"I could have told your ladyship so much The rub lies further on"

"Who by? you would say, man!" The whispering voice was husky in a dry throat "Who by? Sooth, the riddle has a head and a tail, and 'tis *heads* the Parliament will concern itself wi' if we cannot unravel the tale!"

She planted herself stiffly in the seat canopied with Keith arms on the dais of the great hall

"English pounds are worth more than Scotch ones, Barras!" she said meaningly

"You would say, madam, that my messenger was bribed by English gold"—

Chrystal signed silence

"I see you take me," she whispered, glancing at the *bluebottles* hurrying hither and thither through the hall. "We can have our crack the morn, for to say truth I am over-saddlesick and over-travelled to sit in the councillor's seat the night! Old bones are a sore burden to lug, Master Governor, and none but Death's self can save ye from learning so much! Wow! ninety and six years are a sorry band of pilgrims to go jugging it and jogging it out from St Andrews, as I will put the minister in mind o' when next he gives us his Benjamin o' a discouse on *When they persecute ye in one city, flee ye to another!*" she finished, with significance, accepting the arm offered to support her to the apartments hastily prepared.

"You would say, madam, that removal of"—

"Minister Peden is right savoury on a *time to keep silence and a time to speak*," returned Chrystal. "He treats of it in seven, thus—The Speaker, The Listener, The Speech, The Season and the application in threefold,—Is it worth the tongue? Is it worth the ear? wi' What's worth the telling and the tattling, is better worth silence! This much only I say, Barras, that three sides water is three times more than one side land!" She interrupted the glance of comprehension he threw towards the casement framing the sparkling sea, outside the harbour where the castle flotilla rocked at anchor, passports to the world beyond. "But here are we in the chamber that has aye seen the bedding, bearing, and burying of the House o' Keith, and I will be fain o' your company at supper, Barras, if your courtesy will forego my descending to the hall!"

"Your ladyship will find nought wanting to your accommodation as I trust," observed the Governor. "I can answer for the airing of the room, it being that in which I myself commonly lie, as the most commodious and nearest the guardroom."

He cast a last look about the apartment and its hangings of dim arras with a coursing of horse and hounds over its faded breadths, and withdrew. As

the door shut him out, Chrystal turned in dumb anxious appeal to Gordon, entering with her mails

"We hold trumps, my queen of hearts! A few hours at most, bonnibell, and you shall find repose at Dundee! Dame! yon masterly play of yours has given the game into our hands, here are we lodged in the very chamber opening into the secret way that will lead us where we would be, and out of the castle thereafter"

"I am no more than the popinjay of the piece, you and my Leddy Bothwell share the honours!" protested Chrystal, faintly smiling

"The Honours! To-night will bring them forth, but now let Catrine order Lady Keith's head, and then rest while you may!"

Governor Ogilvie found his chatelaine more than ever talkative when supper and he presented themselves together. From the chaiso-curo of her chair—the face adroitly touched up by Catrine, further shaded by the folds of the widow's veil depending from the high frizzled periwig—the little dame declaimed throughout the meal with monotonous fluency that set Barras to tossing off bumper after bumper to vanquish his yawns. Chrystal's pulses raced at fever-speed, her presentment was increasingly perfect, wit and memory vied in the torrent of old woman's chatter in which the supper-time wore away. A dissertation on heraldry—the Leddy Bothwell favoured the subject—had sent the Beaugency flowing at double tides into the tall drinking-glass at the Governor's elbow, when, with the castle bell clashing ten strokes out over sleeping land and restless sea, the speaker interrupted herself

"A'm thinking, Barras, that we've sat as long and as late as discretion would be apt to countenance," she remarked. "Man, it has been a most entertaining hour, but to be plain, ye've neither the years nor the mien on ye, that folks would deem fit for a discreet widow-woman to burn wax longer wi'! Our converse will renew its youth, like the eagles, the morn, for as Master Peden says, it behoves a

female to miss no chance that offers o' bathing herself in the stream o' a man's wisdom, though trowth ' my own experience has observed that whiles such bathing has led, like that o' Pharaoh's daughter, to the winning o' a Moses in the water ' So good-night to ye, Barras, and bid the folk go softly in the morn, for to say truth, I'm no' one to make wings to myself out o' the feathers, when once my head is upon my bed ' "

The worthy soldier had drunk far beyond his usual, slightly unsteady legs carried away a head pleasantly uplifted by wine and a suspicion of vanity. With his passing from the room Chrystal rose, to meet Gordon silently entering. Catrine at his sign disengaged her from veil and farthingale, bringing a towel to wipe the paints from her face. Her own hands shook too helplessly to adjust the dress of an ordinary peasant-girl produced from a saddle-bag, but the waiting-woman was quick and ready, the castle was no more than settling to its sleep before the preparations for the flight were finished.

Passing his arm about Chrystal's waist, Gordon drew back a corner of the faded arras. A door announced itself by an alarming creak to his push, the girl felt herself half-led, half-carried down steps winding into damp and darkness.

CHAPTER XIX

WITH THE HONOURS TO EMBRO'

"WAIT you here !"

The air, increasingly cold, came in a rush past the faces peering through the darkness, which in the last moment or so had shown shot with a faint redness. Eternity had seemed to brood in the secret way, so blank of time or distance had it appeared to Chrystal's perceptions, it was with the bewilderment in which one caught away to Elfland might, after absence—seven years or a night—recognise the familiarity of thorn-studded pasture and the home-village under the lee of the hill, that the eyes dazed by the gloom discerned the outlies of a forge, lighted by a dying fire. The implements of farming, horseshoes in battalions on the wall, the huge turkas left by a smith's lad in the coals, exercised the soothing of the wonted, as the conspirators emerged from behind the peat-stack piled in the arched recess at one end of the castle smithy, a quarter mile and more from the farthest sentinel. The secret way planned by a former Keith given to frolics under the rose, had long gone unused and almost forgotten, the peat-stack, replenished during consumption, told no tales of the entrance behind it.

"If when the east whitens, I am not with you, delay no longer to take the road at the best of your speed with Catrine but till the first cock crows, wait you here !"

"Whither go you ?"

"To put the key in the lock !"

With the answer and a sudden kiss he had vanished behind the peat-stack, leaving the girl to the impotent

waiting that is the weend of womankind The slow moments sapped her courage A wind out of the sea blew up through the horseshoe of the entrance, but her hands and temples burnt as with fire, her lips shivered rather than moved in words of prayer, vain repetitions furnishing her agony with a thorn the more, of contrition for the wanderings of the overwrought brain, not able to realise that the Divine listens with other than man's ears, as with more than man's pity and wisdom, to a soul in stress With wide eyes that saw nothing, with ears that heard shoutings of men and clashings of weapons where there was nought but silence, she endured, every fibre a pain on the rack of her waiting-time Above the tumult that she knew of fancy, her hearing strained itself for the sound that would be the knell of the man rifling the strong-place of Dunnottar of its treasures—the first cockcrow

But the cocks were sleeping still, when, almost unlooked-for at the last, a sod from the peat-stack fell beside her Gordon, calm, but for the blaze in his eyes, stepped out, holding in his arms the load he had gone to fetch

"I deemed best to leave the cases where I found them, empty instead of full," he whispered, laying the bundle wrapped in his cloak on Chrystal's lap "Before supper, by a word dropped of the horse-sickness prevailing at St Andrews, I saw to it that our beasts, as possibly infect, were stabled in the forge-smithy, instead of among the castle horse, though I swore my Lady Countess should this morn be regaled with a proper complaint of her knaves' sauciness' I will but fill my flask from Governor Barras' powder which I spy here, and then up and away!"

A burst of flame as the fire fell in filled the cave-like place with redness The glow brought out into strong light the figure of Chrystal rolling with feat hands the contents of the cloak into smaller compass, it showed Gordon stooping over a small keg near her, but the glow had more to show It showed

beyond the horseshoe entrance the forms of two men in buff and steel-headpieces, and in front crafty, peering, gloating over the rays of light which flashed from the jewelled aiches of that uncovered for a single instant from the cloak in Chrystal's lap, the face set in the red hair of Sandy Hope

The stupefaction of the flame's betrayal lasted no second with Gordon, warned first by Chrystal's low cry With a bound he had drawn out the great pincers gleaming red under the half-burnt log, and sprung in front of the women For moments that were hours in the darkness the three in the forge waited the three without, then a whisper of the Highland woman thrilled the gloom

"They are away!"

Another flash of light pierced the dark Gordon, releasing the paling iron from his hand, turned to see, by the flame from the flint and steel in Catrine's girdle-pouch, Chrystal, kneeling above the contents of the powder-keg, overturned as he had not left it

"It should have been fired ere the Tod had got his grip on it!" she said steadily, uncovering the treasures that the gunpowder had warded. But then the brave voice shook, the feminine splendid daring ended in a feminine burst of tears

With a sudden sick realisation of what might have been, Gordon, ashen through his tan, caught her roughly to him, pressing kisses that were vows on her hair, her face, her eyes His world was in his arms, all else was forgotten till a sentence in the Gaelic pierced his consciousness

"Catrine is right The horses carry our lives this day!" he said rapidly, passing out to where the beasts were picketed

The hill-path that had seemed precipitous in daylight was taken at breakneck speed, but Chrystal had no moment for the tremors that the pebbles bounding over the edge of the chasm had caused her twelve hours before Herself held firmly in her husband's arm, their precious burden clasped in her own, she quivered with his every turn in the

saddle towards the dark towers roosting high above, to seek the lights and sounds that would announce to the fugitives a pursuit

"Before now they must have given the alarm to the castle!" he muttered, as their beasts stretched themselves in a gallop on the more level ground, from which the black rock of Dunnottar arched itself like the back of an angry cat. Catrine, bringing her pony alongside, spoke

"Their road led downward, and not up!" Gordon repeated after her. "What should that portend for us?"

Daylight had broken over land and sea before the answer to his question came. The chord of colour with its seven harmonies struck by the finger of Dawn, had vibrated from the east into the full light, when a movement from Adam checked the rhythmic beating of horse-hoofs. Standing in his stirrups, he looked long and keenly to his left, where the sunbeams glittered on a distant brightness that gave back their rays

"Steel!" he cried sharply

The horses, given the rein, fled forward once more

"Nick me ass, never to have so much as thought of it!" The men with your kinsman were none of the Parliament's, but Noll's by their buff and steel! That tells what I could not, why by now we have not a plump of Dunnottar's spears riding it on our heels!"

"Noll Cromwell! But what should take Tod Sandy among his country's foes, for he it was, there's no miskenning the fox-face of him?"

"No, nor the treachery in it!" Gordon returned. "Can you, hand on heart, swear that there's aught in yon lousy knave would stickle an instant at taking his turn out of his country's foes, and were the price to be paid for it his country's shame?"

Chrystal panted

"Esmé said that Embro' would be over hot for the Tod, with the tale of his old treachery to the Covenant once set abroad! Can it be that he has cast in his lot with Cromwell's party?"

"It would offer no difficulty to him, with the Roundheads at Musselburgh," Adam agreed thoughtfully "If our guess be right, 'twould show why the spies did not shoot me down last night, when I stood a fair mark for them. A Scot with a story of the hidie-hole of the Regalia might be worth Cromwell's testing by sending him northward with some few soldiers to spy out the truth of his tale, but the advance-guard last night dared not risk a shot that might have brought the castle-soldiery about their ears! Could I but know how 'twas possible for yon red villain to have smelt out the whereabouts of the Honours!"

A meditative silence fell on him, broken only by occasional encouragements to the horses. The latter had broken out of the long stretching gallop that had covered the ground gallantly, the sun was strong and the road uphill when the Highland girl with a strange gesture slipped from her pony, to fling herself along the ground. The bourdon of the bees in the heather, and a plaintive far-off calling of sheep filled Chrystal's ears in her own startled hearkening, but the drowsy humming and monotonous bleats were no sounds to pale Catrine's face, as she gathered herself up and spoke with flying breath

"The Slough-dogs are out!"

The words seemed to have fallen unconsciously from the man's lips, so devouring was his listening to the further vehement speech with which Catrine pointed now to the hills purple before them, now to Chrystal herself, driving her nails into the soft flesh in her agony of impatience to know the worst, hidden from her by the Gaelic. A cry broke from her at last

"What—what does she say?"

Gordon's clasp was passionate about her

"Can it be asked even of a Cavalier that he should risk a two-days' wife?"

"Ay, his wife, if must be, but not his honour!"

Chrystal spoke with a strange premonition, watching the haggard indecision in her husband's face. The

steadfastness in her faltering words braced him, he answered firmly

"Ay! The Trust before all! No question of party is it now, but of saving the Honours from the men red with king's blood! My may, 'tis for you to take them to Embro', while I draw off the sleuth-hounds on my scent, making for the Highlands. Those who have laid the dogs on, will never dream that the treasures lifted from Dunnottar will be sped back to Embro', you and Catrine, going forward on foot, will be safe enough!"

"What of you?"

"Trust me to lead the dogs a dance to puzzle 'em!" Gordon was off his horse, dividing the load Chrystal had held into two parts. "Born and bred to the Highlands, 'twill go hard if I cannot shake off a leash of hounds in the long-run, or no great matter if they track me down, with you fairly beyond reach. The slough-dogs maintained by these parishes are trained to mouth gently the game they catch, catch-polls on four legs instead of two, they will but do the catchpolls' office of laying a knave in ward! So, bonnibell, no need to bring that white face to the house on the Flodden-Wall, where Black Evan awaits the coming of the Honours. At sight of this my token, he will guard you like a sister till my coming."

He slipped a signet—its sapphire curiously cut in intaglio—on Chrystal's thumb, drawing her to him in a silent passion of farewell. Stunned by the change wrought by a couple of moments, she lifted a white, strained face to his, resolutely brave, her arms accepting the packet which he laid within them.

A word from Catrine, stooping for the larger burden, brought a gleam into his sad eyes.

"*Thig Dia re h'Arrc's chà'n Arrc nar thig!*" he echoed, "a good word to travel with! God comes in the dark hour, and the hour is dark no longer when He comes!"

With a sensation as though the actual heart in her was being torn from where it had clung, Chrystal

watched the heather widen between herself desolate, and the horseman with the sheltie, destined to be cast loose by and by, trotting at his rein. Catrine's hands, wrapping her feet in swathes of bracken recalled her to the present, with her trail thus blurred she followed on mechanically towards the mellow rippling of a stream. Throwing fleeting glances at that dear growingly-distant figure, Chrystal entered it, pressing Gordon's trust to the heart as she would cradle child of his.

The stream had long rippled cool under the wayfarers' feet before Catrine with signs and eyes made Chrystal understand that the pursuit had turned aside from them. It was safe and speedier to take up their going on the flower-strewn land, and the two made good way, the Highlander leading as surely as in her home-croft. Miles inlaid with the ivory of Queen of the Meadows or the turquoise of forget-me-not, lay behind them, when they made their night-halt in a rock-studded pasture, hem to the skirts of a deer-forest curving grey and bare up and away from them, but where the bracken that waved like a green flood about the girls in their down-lying kept them dry and warm through the short summer night.

With the morrow the strange silent pilgrimage unfolded itself, further monotonous enough to Chrystal in spite of the kindness she had come to feel for her companion, whose care of the delicate creature never flagged, relieving Chrystal's footsoreness of the second day by the annexing in Highland fashion of another sheltie from his pasture where he was feeding with the cattle, and setting aside the choicer morsels of food for which, leaving her mistress and the ill-begotten steed in cover, Catrine would quest among the dwellings, otherwise avoided by them. The appropriation of the sheltie concerned Chrystal's conscience, but a gesture towards the packet in her arms was an eloquent contemner of scruples, as of the loneliness which at times would make her keen for even a scanty sentence of Scottish speech.

It was, however, with an undeniable thrill of pleasure that, waiting thus for Catrine on the third or fourth evening of their wanderings, that the girl heard a girl's voice singing near. A little wood of hazels hid the singer for the first moments, then the green branches parted to reveal a lass with an armful of gold-flowered broom, her lilt broken by the start with which she perceived the stranger. For a second the two measured each other with their eyes.

"Your pardon if I trespass, but I knew not human dwelling was near," Chrystal broke the silence.

"Eh, none but the bower Mary and I have bigged on Burn Braes," the other responded. "You'll no' have come out from Perth way?" she added, with an evident anxiety.

Chrystal shook her head.

"I am for Embro', from the north."

"Be warned and keep your distance from St Johnstone's city then!" cried the girl. "The pestilence is there, broke out when I was visiting wi' Mary's folk, of Lednoch, ye ken! Mary and I are geyan chief, but my father would not have thankit me to bring her from the plague-roost of Perth to Kinvaid, so we e'en have biggit us a hut here on the brae, and theekit it o'er wi' green rushes, and have made a cosy down-sitting of it out of the infect parts. The air of the greenwood is like to be more sovereign than the mutchkins of Malvoisie wine distilled wi' herbs, treacle, and Angelic water, which the laird, Mary's father, sups day in day out, till he has neither wit nor tongue to bid us go or stay!"

"But how come ye off for your eating?" Chrystal demanded. The girl, as though reminded of a duty, stooped to gather some broom fallen from her sheaf.

"A friend—our lad," she lingered on the words with a little air of fond pride, "carries us victualling twice in the week," she returned. "Mary will be waiting on these flowers, for this is his night, and we aye like to deck the bower against his coming. And Mary and I will be blithe o' your company to supper, for ye cannot bide your lone in this thicket."

"I have one with me, but she speaks nought but the Gaelic, of which I know not the first whimper. Fain indeed am I to hear wi' my ears and speak wi' my tongue for this night," responded Chrystal, signing as she best might her intentions to Catrine, returned and curiously surveying the new acquaintance.

The damsel nodded, leading a few steps on through the coppice to a space cleared by some woodsman of old, at one grassy side of which stood a sylvan hut, green and brown as the clusters of nuts on the background of hazels. Another girl, auburn hair drawn high above a pale face, stood between the silver-flecked birch-trees that formed living lintels to the bower woven with willow-wands and stopped with heather, thatchings of green rushes forming the roof.

"Come away, Bessie Bell!" she cried "'Tis Finlay's hour, and the cakes are to mix and the fish to brander, and"—

She paused, as her friend led up Chrystal, to give smiling welcome, before the business of preparation went briskly forward. The savour of baking cakes and trout rolled in oatmeal went out through the clearing, while the bower took on more than ever an air of faery doings with the gold of broom and garnet of heather disposed about it. Someone coming out of the trees sent a shout before him, answered in glad tumult by the maids of the bower, Mary letting fall the last of her flowers, and Bessie leaving her cooking to care itself, as they turned for frank kisses of the new-comer, a lad of mist-blue eyes and debonaire allure.

Chrystal, a guest of the evening, felt the whole scene a ballad of the greenwood. The eyes, already with something of the matron's aloofness—a further initiation into the mysteries of life—in their grey depths, went consideringly over the three young things, knit apparently only by the kinship of friendship to one another. The lad Finlay showed a brother's familiarity, but he had glances of quite another admiration for the girls older than himself, whose

evident pride in the handsome boy was prettily touched by maternal protectiveness. Something of the causeless sadness which steals over the listener to dance-music came at last on Chrystal, as though the ballad must break at the end into a mourning burden, the gay melody transformed into minor cadences and a refrain of heartbreak. The fancy was with her still, when with the outpeeping of the stars, the lad made his good-nights, wandering between the girls across the glade to a ride among the tree-stems. Suddenly to Chrystal the figures of the maidens calling teasing sayings after the boy looking back, his white teeth flashing in his boy's laughter, were blotted out, the bower seemed to hang in her sight, seared and pitiful as a last year's nest, the gay summer life gone from it. The vision was with her through all the feminine chatter that accompanied the settling for the night of herself and Catrine in the dry sheltered space hospitably shared by its mistresses.

"A good conscience makes a snug bedfellow!" Mary Gray quoted merrily to a lament of Bessie's over the scanty plenishing. "The like is written up on a stone in Methven Kirkyard, where you and I must look to lie one day among our noble kin!"

The careless words struck like an omen upon Chrystal, oppressed to sleeplessness by the burden of the days, present and to come. She was glad when light made the wood green again, and, kindly farewell bidden to the maids of the bower, she could take the road once more.

The land was swathed in rain-clouds as the travellers stepped southwards, and the miry tracks were clogs to the feet that would fain go fast. The sad river which kept them company through half a day swelled like sorrow over the shallows where yesterday the blue of the forget-me-nots had hidden the gravel as though the summer sky mirrored itself where water there was none, dripping garments and creeping cold added to the melancholy of Chrystal's mood. With nightfall announced by the belling of the deer from

the hill, the wet, weary wanderers dared not beg a night's lodging from one of the farmhouses with "the witches' fire" cast in red reflection on the ground without from the glowing hearth within, lest some accident should reveal the treasure borne by such weak wardens, Catrine's searchings could not discover so much as a *fausehouse* in the side of a green cornstack, an opening which, though winnowed by the wind, would offer better lying-out than the wet fields. Reluctantly abandoning even such a poor hope of shelter, Chrystal followed her guide to the leeward side of a slope overgrown with brambles, the earth under the steep falls of the larger bushes seeming their likeliest camping-place.

An exclamation from Catrine roused her mistress from her shivering wretchedness. A great grey stone overhung by sharp-sided briars had rolled back under the vigorous scooping with which the Highland girl had set herself to enlarge what had seemed a fox's earth, a low-roofed cave stretched into darkness before them. Huddling with glad alacrity into the hostelry thus opened, the ground sloped sharply downwards as the girls groped on, seeking a corner of refuge from the wind unexpectedly cold that blew up on them, icy through their soaked garments. Chrystal's numbed limbs wellnigh refused office, her exhausted condition distracting her attendant's attention from their surroundings, till a bend in the cavern brought them almost to the brim of a dark water, on which a small-sailed smack was in process of lading by four or five men.

Retreat was as dangerous as advance, and Catrine dragged her companion to crouch behind one of the large casks which two men apiece were in deft silence arranging along the deck of the craft, on which so little room remained that there was hope the barrels farthest from the waterside would be left for another cargo. The leader of the apparent smugglers—a tall sinewy man of an olive complexion, the darker for its shading of dense black hair—appeared to think as much

"No need after all to wait till our lads fill the rest of the casks," he said, speaking in a very polished tone "Best not all our eggs in one creel Noll has a supper here to give him nightmare should he intercept us!"

A foot raised to spring on shipboard, his penetrating black eyes swept the place, falling on two light-points in the gloom Swinging on his heel, he strode straight to the cask behind which two innocent trespassers were cowered

"You have not played as I, hide-and-seek with little King Louis and Monsieur his brother in the gardens of the Tuileries of an evening, ladies, or you would have learnt to shut your eyes in hiding," he said, saluting gravely "The sex can never be unwelcome, but at the risk of failing in courtesy, I must ask your business?"

"Sir, we are travellers to Embro', and did but seek a nook to cuddle in for the night," Chrystal faltered, the flickering of a torch revealing the pleading in the pale face

"I am in luck to be able to forward you on your journey, madam," the gentleman returned courteously "My craft is bound for Embro' with its cargo, and I am happy to afford you and your woman free passage"

Chrystal clasped her hands A voyage with a crew of smugglers left little chance that the Honours would ever come to Edinburgh town

"Of pity, sir, go your ways and leave us to go ours!" she cried

"Nay, madam, you have seen too much of us not to see more," responded the smuggler-captain "And your sex is better versed in holding hands and hearts than tongues"—

He stopped The black eyes had fallen on the hand, that, like face and voice, betrayed breeding incongruous with the peasant-dress A blue ray from Gordon's sapphire saluted the torch-flame

"How came you by yon signet?" he asked abruptly

The white lips set firm on the secret which, unlike that other trust, might be protected by a resolute

will With a courtly gesture her interlocutor raised the small hand towards the light

"Yon device of Daphne with the laurel sprouting from her finger-tips should be, as Spottiswood related, the gift of a queen, placed warm from her own finger on that of the choicest of the Cavaliers!" he muttered Under the pressure of his nail a spring gave way, revealing an auburn lock of hair beneath The olive-faced man glanced up with sudden fire

"The hair of martyred Charles!" he ejaculated "Madam, how come you by the jewel that Montrose received from the Queen-Mother, and which, as I have been told, he was wont to make a token of to friends of the Cause, fitly enough symbolised by a maid in stress?"

He straightened himself as his breathless question was met by silence

"It seems my ship must sail under the sign of the Silent Woman!" he observed satirically, offering his fingers in imperative invitation They were refused with soft dignity, the girl preparing to follow where she must, both arms clasped about the cloak-bag held to her

A cry from Catrine made the two pause in their passage One of the sailor-men had laid rude hands on the bundle in her plaid, curiosity awake over its unusual length and weight The dark-skinned man brought hand to hilt, he spoke sternly, the eager look which the unexpected sound of his Gaelic brought to the Highland girl's face only fading at the repeated gesture Chrystal made to her for silence, before, head high, she stepped down on the crowded deck, where brief orders from her conductor had already resulted in the clearing of a rough cabin for the women's accommodation As the two descended into the ill-smelling space, the gentleman threw his sword in its scabbard across the open hatch

"For the sake of one who wore the jewel on your thumb before you did, madam, 'tis your ægis!" quoth he "My men are wild Highlanders, but my sword will be sufficient barrier between you and their lawlessness!"

Resolute in her policy of silence, Chrystal bent her head coldly, fearful lest an unwary word might give the clue of her errand to the keen wits which she divined in the smuggler-captain. The boat was moving, slipping along the dark stream under the skilful poling of unseen steersmen. With the unlooked-for championship conjured forth by Gordon's sapphire, hope was astir in the gul again, dreamy thoughts of the black barge sailing from dark to dark towards the harbours of Avillion relaxed her mood, till the wind freshening through the cribbed space made sleep possible, in spite of the little vessel's response to the wooing of the sea through the embassy of the tide running up through Tay Firth.

The bar of midnight had been passed when Chrystal woke with the wash of the waves against the ship, lying-to. Fish-smells were in her nostrils, her listening told her that a cargo was presumably being shifted, though the problem of their disposition on the cask-crowded deck made her doze again even before the boat was cast off from the other, whose crew's shouts continued to follow across the widening distance. Day was broad and high when Catrine's movements roused her next, first to assure herself by touch of the safety of the Trust, and then to stand dizzily upright with eyes level to the deck.

The fish taken on board in the night glistened everywhere, the blues and greens of their sea-tints covering the casks completely from sight. At the appearance of the girl-face, the captain advanced over the slippery, brilliant heaps.

"You are not ill-convenienced, as I trust, madam, with the fish?" The wind is blowing its best for us, already you may see the Bass like a black cloud ahead, if wind and luck hold we may sup on Edinburgh baps to-night. Meanwhile what food we have is heartily at your disposal, though had I known of your coming, the provisioning would have been more suited to your delicacy."

Chrystal almost resented the unconcerned appetite which Catrine brought to bear on the food. The

enforced inaction seemed to whet the fears and longings for her husband, kept at bay hitherto by the absorption of the errand undertaken for him. Huddled in the twilight cabin, she petulantly rejected the Highland girl's attempts at establishing an understanding, though a couple of words—MacConnuill Dhu—were so frequently repeated as to strike her drowsy senses. Faint with fasting and the airless space she fell into a lethargy, wakening at an imperative touch on her arm to find the keel beneath her at rest, and its captain standing over her.

"Your pardon, madam, for breaking in on your slumbers, but they had best be finished on land. Stay though, I have, no doubt, your word to make nought of an outcry in our passage?"

"Your alternative must be more disagreeable to me, sir, than the company in which ill-luck entrapped me, if I am not to take the first chance that offers to rid myself of it," the girl returned.

"The alternative, madam, is a muffler, which most women would deem worse than the company of a gentleman, who for the rest desires to treat you with all honour," responded the other unmovedly. "Twelve hours more will see you at liberty, but for the present we must travel under the ensign of the Silent Woman still."

The olive face held no softening in it for the spirit and sweetness of the one bent towards him then with a cold gesture of assent.

"You give your parole?"

"Take it, sir, since you have taken so much already," Chrystal replied to the demand, brief and business-like as to a prisoner of war.

The gentleman bowed, assisting the women to the deck level with the grass-grown quay. Seawards in the starlight, the girls perceived mistily a crescent line of shipping, lanterns here and there glimmering at the mastheads.

"The English fleet who have had good bargains of our cargoes of fish," the captain said in a low tone. "In these last weeks they have grown used to seeing

our smack lie up here for the night, before putting out to sea with the tide”

As he spoke a boat glided noiselessly to the smack's side, the rowers resting on muffled oars, for the women to be lifted into it. Clasp ing her precious packet, Chrystal had no more than drawn breath over Catrine's safe transit before the boat was in motion, making for the water-lane which emptied itself into the harbour at a little distance. Houses with crazy balconies and gables leaned to each other across the ditch up which the boat made silent speed, more than once barred by a water-hatch which went up slowly at a peculiar whistle from the rowers. On through the darkness and silence went the muffled oars, the stream growing fouler and narrower with every inch of its sluggish length from Leith. Silent as the ferry-boat of the souls, the boat stole on and up, till the evilly-odorous water bore it under an archway, the oars were shipped before a ladder pendent from a point beyond sight in the wall above. The girl, shuddering involuntarily back from the slimy rungs, was relieved by the impatience of the leader, who, scantily ceremonious as though she had been a bale of goods, bore her up the ladder to deposit her on the floor of a room, one door of which opened on the water below.

“Houses of this ilk have given the water-bailie his trouble in their time, but with Leslie's lines at Leith and English bottoms in Scotch waters, smuggling has of late gone out of fashion,” he observed, as Chrystal sank wearily on one of the casks with which the room was strewn. “I will task your complaisance no further than a few steps, to an apartment something more comfortable”

A kinder look dawned in his hawk-eyes as he opened an adjoining door and signed the worn-white girl within.

“Your ring's a buckler, so sleep without fear,” he said. “I myself will play watchdog across your threshold, nor for watchdog's bone ask more of you

than that you will keep silence to others as stoutly as you have kept it to me"

"I am not in the way of sharing secrets with smugglers, sir," Chrystal answered briefly. The gentleman's half-smile deepened.

"You will be the readier to keep silence then, madam, over having through a moonlight and a sunlight companied with—the Smugglers of Tay! Such a pledge must be the price of your freedom," he finished more sternly, producing from his vest a golden reliquary, "and here's a straw from the thatch of Loretto's House to take oath on"

Clear Havens' daughter shook her head.

"The faith bigged on a straw would have poor foundation!" she said with a smile.

The Highlander's face clouded.

"Puritan though you are, you yet hold one thing sacred," he said harshly, stepping back against the wall. "Lay your hand on me, and swear by Him who ended on the Rood you will not betray us."

He threw wide his arms cross-wise as he spoke, the gigantic figure in his strange posture holding Chrystal's eyes.

"I may not take your oath, sir, but I give a Hope's word," she said at last. "And it is no weakling to need the crutch of an oath to help it to stand fast."

His look searched her face for a half minute, then the outstretched arms sank.

"By token that you will take no oath, you are the more likely to keep it!" the gentleman said then. "So be it, this night you will be in safe keeping, and when you find your door unguarded, go in peace."

"I would fain accept your courtesy with a more willing mind!" Chrystal responded. "The threshold, as I fear, will make a hard lying in the stead of that which you have voided in my favour."

"If a man's fatigues are not feathers enough for his pillow, he deserves no other," her host returned, his bow leaving Chrystal free to shut him out.

The weariness on her passed into sleep with the laying of her head on the box-bed, but the noises of

the casks landed at intervals in the next room pierced her sleep, her dreams a background to them. Not till the lading had been hushed before the light, did her slumber grow soft and healing, not waning till it made stiff limbs supple and head clear once more.

Catrine moving at her side, roused her at last. Not yet were the prisoners free to go forth, a sign towards the door told Chrystal as much, though by the light they had slept long. A spider dangling from his cord tickled her face, she brushed at it carelessly. It ran up again, disappearing through a knothole in the wall. The girl knelt up in the bed to put her eye to the hole. As she expected, it looked into the room to which she had come from the water, it was empty, some of the casks lying empty also on their sides, others still upright. Chrystal, watching, started. The lid of a cask was slowly rising, the eye at the peephole beheld two other eyes peering over the rim. By inches the lid rose, then it was thrown back, a man fierce-eyed, armed, rose out of it, giving three light knocks to the cask nearest. A second man emerged at the summons, the two left the chamber stealthily.

Startled and curious, the watcher knelt till, at a signal undetected by her, another and another cask gave up their smuggled freight. The casks were all empty before, by a pluck at her arm, Catrine arrested her attention, to show that the door softly opened by the woman's hand offered no hindrance to their outgoings. Chrystal took the precaution to cover the spyhole before, her garments brought to as much neatness as moor and hill had left to them, she and her companion lifted the Honours from their night's concealment in the bed-coverings, and made ready to set forth.

A dingy light as of storm flooded the street as the girls crept into it from the deserted house. Chrystal perceived it to be earlier than she had fancied, but the threat in the sky with the lurid purple clouds serried above the strange brightness seemed to find echo in the air of foreboding that oppressed the few

still abroad on their ordinary business. Faces and voices charged with secret apprehensions touched Chrystal with uneasiness through her quick flitting past, she cowered into the shadows of a turnpike stair as a party of stern-faced men in the gowns and bands of the preachers came towards her, talking in heavy dogmatic tones.

"Cromwell cries 'Peace, Peace,' but had Zimri peace who slew his master?" proclaimed one as they went by. "He offers us safe-keeping that we may come down from the castle and feed our flocks, but what safe-keeping will avail in a land infested by sectaries and blasphemers?"

Their steps died in the distance, and Chrystal prepared to steal on. She was about stepping down from the doorway when she started back, clutching Catrine, to hide deeper in the shadows. Through the storm-light and the lonely street, a tall man in a black cloak was walking fast, holding a child of some seven years by the hand. The child, dragged beyond its speed, seemed awed above protest by the tallness and the blackness of its conductor, with the tears standing in its blue, innocent eyes, it was hurried along by the strides rendered uneven through the glances which the man threw continually over his shoulder, as though expecting at each moment to feel the grip of a pursuer gaining, always gaining on his haste. Something haggard had come to the face under the steeple-crowned hat, its floridness had grown hectic, wandering fires seemed alight in the eyes caverned with blackness. Black against the storm-light Major Weir passed across the doorway, to vanish in the narrowings of the street with the hurrying pace and the backward look and the little child grasped by the hand.

Moments had gone by before Chrystal dared to creep out once more on her way. The wynd opened on the High Street, but the steps to be taken to the close where the house on the Flodden-Wall lied like a Jacob through an aspect to the world, though few in themselves, were sore enough to her.

Yet she strove on, grateful for the falling night, on, though with attainment of her goal and Catrine's soft knock, the girl who had brought the Honours to town, had scarcely breath for a whisper of the password

The door widened from its first chink, and the olive face of the gentleman from Tay shore looked out upon the new-comers

CHAPTER XX

IN ARGYLE'S LODGING

THE man's hand caught at Chrystal's wrist, and dragged her within

"So, you have tracked me here! Yet it needs a stronger leash of slough-dogs than a pair of wenches to pull down Lochiel!"

The words, falling coolly from the man's lips, sent an odd thrill through the girl as she faced him in the plain bare room. Unconsciously her hands toyed with the parcel pressed to her bosom.

"Lochiel's self! What word has this token for him then?"

The watchful look went from her face to the ring, from the ring back to her face.

"What word came with it to you?" the question countered hers.

"That *show it* would rhyme with *know it*!" replied Chrystal promptly.

"And *ring* with *king*!" completed the gentleman.

"And a refrain to run thus—

'Over hills and heather brown,
Lo, his honour's come to town!'

The last words spoken very slowly, finished Chrystal's hesitation. Gravely, eyes on his, she unrolled her plodon, the golden crown shone out, its sapphires and diamonds flashing greeting to the fading daylight. Lochiel put a knee to the ground and kissed the surmounting cross, before he carried the kiss to Chrystal's fingers.

"Your husband ought to quarter a Silent Woman with his arms!" he cried, as Catrine, at a sign, sur-

rendered her burden, leaving it for her mistress to reveal the crystal-topped sceptre and the great sword of state in its crimson velvet scabbard "By the graves of Iona ' little dreamt I of the freakish chance that brought the Honours of Scotland on board the vessel by which for the last month I have been running leal men into Embro', in readiness for the Royalist trick about to be concerted on the Parliament ' Chance, or fate, or omen, my sloop as I find having made its last run, Noll Cromwell, sharper than our bailies, having spied out our water-ditch and given orders to stop it up forthwith "

"How? Cromwell here in Edinburgh?"

A frown darkened the olive face further

"It was the news that handselled me this morning Lesley of the Parliament side, in his folly allowed himself to be forced from his strong position on the skirts of the Lammermuirs, goaded thereto by the ravings of the preachers, that they should go down to the Philistines at Gilgal and give battle on the level plain 'Twas as disastrous a coming down the hill for Lesley as the one for Jock and Gill of the bairns' rhyme," the speaker added with a slight smile, "but for us Royalists the move may not be such an ill one after all It will have weakened the hands of the Parliament men, and aught that does that strengthens ours But of our goodness, madam, what put this errand on your shoulders, for when I opened the door to the password, but now, I looked to see another messenger?"

A perplexity dashed the exultation in his face at the brief explanation

"Gordon of Brackley headed for the Highlands, or prisoner of the English or the Parliament!" he cried, striking his hand on the table with its glittering burden "He must be the son of a May wedding for such ill-luck to have befallen him!"

Chrystal whitened "Is there danger?" she faltered

"For him little—for the Cause much!" Lochiel paced the room "It means delay, and delay means—

ruin ! Brackley of us all is the one on whom hung the best chance of concerting secretly with the King over the steps needful to put him at the head of his loyal Highlanders Should the plot leak out—and if it were those of Dunnottar who set the slough-dogs after the bold thieves of the regalia, leak out it must—farewell to Loyalist hopes ! ”

“ But why must it be Adam, and not another, to carry the word ? ”

“ The King, since the Parliament’s jealousy took umbrage at the enthusiasm for him in the camps at Leith, has been carried back to Stirling and doubly spied upon,” returned Lochiel gloomily “ Brackley, not having had art or part in Montrose’s rising, is less marked than the rest of us, forbye being sib by marriage to one of Argyle’s household, so that his visit to Gillespie Grumach’s Lodging, where the Stewart is quartered in Stirling, would have a fair show and a right opportunity ”

Chrystal, her fingers straying restlessly over the jewelled arches of the crown, launched another question—

“ And if he comes not ? ”

“ The Cause is lost ! ”

“ Not through a Gordon ! ” The restless fingers were still now “ If not Brackley, then Brackley’s wife ! ”

The Highland chief stared at the delicate creature speaking with sudden fire

“ What means, madam, have you to get speech of the King ? ”

“ I have had it before now ” Chrystal flushed and paled under his look “ He and La Jeunesse his valet, have seen me in a disguise, do you procure me the like of it, and the rest is mine to do—for Adam,” she whispered the last words with an instant’s quiver of sweet resolute lips

“ The arrow feathered by woman’s wit flies far ! ” the man muttered thoughtfully “ The Covenant is known to have consolations for its prisoners, the latch of his prison may, after all, be lighter for

a woman's fingers than a man's to lift " He paused again, with a smile in the eyes that had marked a distressful flush "Madam," he said, "I kissed with a goodwill the hand of the woman who could keep faith and silence, permit me now in the name of all true men to touch the hand of the wife whose loyalty has French Bayard's motto '*Sans peur et sans reproche*' " "

A rose of colour acknowledged the chivalrous tact, but the flush was no longer painful Preparations for the unforeseen journey filled the hours during which Lochiel initiated the girl in the details of her task of arranging the King's Start to join the body of his Royalist adherents The needful disguise had been procured, and Catrine once more made up her mistress for her part, though this time it was reckoned expedient that the old woman travelling alone towards Stirling should appear a burgher's wife Chrystal was passive through the proceedings, only once rousing herself to leave with the porter of the house on the wall a message in case of her husband's arrival in her absence, triumphing over the doorkeeper's taciturnity sufficiently to exact a promise that he would enjoin on Gordon to appoint a meeting-place should circumstances hurry him from Edinburgh The night was frosted with September stars when the little party set out on their road towards Leith, where Black Evan's sloop offered the easiest means of bringing the messenger to her goal The smell of the sea was salt and strong when Lochiel beside Chrystal came to a halt From the shadows of the street a shadow came to join their fellowship, the tapping of a staff struck the night

"For whom will true men wear blacks to their graves ? "

The girl's shocked heart saluted the voice that spoke

"For one who went white to his ! " Lochiel completed the password The shadow had joined forces with the shadows, when the chief stopped short.

"What doth the wean ? "

By the starlight, from the blackness of the great cloak folded about the new-come, the face of a sleeping child peeped out. The man addressed gave short answer

"I go nowhere without her!"

"And her puppet-house and her minnie belike!" Lochiel's reply was impatient. "Good Major Weir, think you that we are out a-sweetening, that we should take the bairns? We are pressed—you must hasten to leave her!"—

"Where she goes, I go!"

"To the devil if you will, but not with us!"

Chrystal felt her breath straiten. From where Weir stood his look was on herself, the staff in his hand was lengthening slowly towards her, round her, as a dog might nose. The Highlander's patience had worn thin.

"Please yourself, but so will I me," he said in the subdued tones in which both men had spoken. "Abide with the brat, or leave her to a trusty fellow of mine who will bring her safe to your house. Myself would trust this one Burn!"—

"I please myself!" Weir had swung on his heel, hastening as though in flight back among the shadows. A laughter low and loud sounded to the listening group.

"Ho! ho! ho! for the men who travel with a white maid among them!"

"Ho! ho! ho! for the Plot which will die as a seven-month's babe!"

"Ho! ho! ho! for the King who will pay with the loss of a head the one who gives him a crown!"

"By the graves of Iona!" he knows more than I thought!" Lochiel muttered before the mocking echoes thinning into distance. "Were it wisest to after him and secure his silence, or to push on and hasten events?"

"Sir, I have heard men say that the staff in his hand tells him secret things," Chrystal interrupted. "Sure am I that by it he smelt out who I was to-night!"—

their sylvan wildness, before the vessel lay-to at the edge of a grove, and Lochiel pointed to a foot-track running up into the green perspective

"Yon path will bring you to the King's Knot in the castle gardens," he said "From there 'twill be easy to reach the town by the Royal Chace, if luck hold, to-night will see you among us again Meanwhile have you courage to go your lone, or shall one of the clan bear company ? This black face of mine is over kenspeckle for me to venture it in Argyle's neighbourhood "

Chrystal shook her head.

"Self keeps step best with self ! A Gaelic tongue—and your men carry no other—might tell tales, and for the rest, none are like to guess me under this disguise Fear not for the plot, should the worst come, you have seen I can play the part of the Silent Woman ! "

She stepped out on the wood-path, walking fast before the thought of her assumed part checked her speed, the more moderate pace, however, bringing her out tolerably soon upon a gay knot of flower-beds cut in the turf, centring about an eight-sided mound Grey rocks showed through green trees above, but the winding walks leading to palace and castle were not for Chrystal's feet that day, after a moment she turned towards where glimpses of gabled roofs peeped above the bracken growths of the Chace where the King's deer had their housekeeping

The town was nearer when the stranger approaching paused again To walk straight on Argyle's Lodging where the King housed, to ask straight for La Jeunesse, was Chrystal's plan, but the turrets and wretched doorways flanking a steep hill-street bewildered the girl who could thread the mosshags and cliffs of the Lammermuirs on the darkest night Up and down she went, growingly puzzled, till at sight of a youth daundering with bent head in the path she quickened her steps

"Young sir, of your goodness point a strange body to the airt where the King lodges ? "

In her feigned voice she spoke on coolly to the end of her sentence, showing nothing of the surprise that shocked through her as the lad addressed turned the face of Dandy Jock

Dandy's appearance had altered for the better His suit of murrey cloth set to his slim figure, the cutting and waving of his yellow hair showed the barber's hand He fluted a laced handkerchief

"Good mother, when you spoke I was something occupied with the polishing of a poesy that had come to me in the night-watches! What's your will?"

"Haith lad, 'twould better befitt ye to be polishing your laird's stirrup-irons!" Chrystal could not forbear the retort "But I have more business than you bude to have, so gien it pleases you to point me out my Lord Argyle's Lodging, I'se e'en leave ye to polish your poesy to what brightness it'll take!"

"Chrystal!" cried Dandy Jock sharply

"What for suld ye cry 'crystal'?" The girl, startled, fluttered, and regretting her imprudence, yet made gallant defence "For as perjink as ye think ye are, ye'd hear worser truths than yon did I abide long in your presence, so I'se e'en take my leave," she finished, turning from him, but the lad's hand came on her arm

"Ye gave me the slip once, Chrystal Hope, but I ken ye this time!" he cried triumphantly "Ye've giped at me too often for me not to know the ring o' your gibing voice, as I knew the old wife who played me the bonny trick a while back!" With a quick movement he plucked the hood and wig from the fair head "The day of your cruelty is over, mistress mine, as the dame I bring you to will show you presently!"

He set off at a half-run, dragging his prisoner with him After the first the girl ceased to hang back, her quick wits piecing recollection of the dame in Leith Kirk-Gate with the hope that Jock's patroness, Argyle's niece, might chance to have abode in the very house she sought Dandy Jock was breathless when he brought up at last before the rough-hewn

gateway of a mansion with extinguisher turrets and decorated windows

"Is my lady visible?" he asked a lackey

"The Lady Jean's chocolate is served," the servant answered, with a stare for the figure in old woman's garments and the uncovered girl's head. Dandy Jock pushed on, hurrying his cousin down a corridor which he trod with well-accustomed feet. He threw open the door of a bedchamber, bouncing in with the assured unceremoniousness of a household pet. A woman in the bed with its counterpane stiff with gold thread, started from a lazy elbow as her eyes went to the opening door.

"The King's Butter!" she cried. "My troth, but this passes! What do ye here, ye shameless baggage?"

"To prove the fool my kinsman is, madam, I think," returned Chrystal tartly, striving to shake off the clutch on her arm, as her captor dragged her within the *ruelle*.

"Sweet my lady, permit me to set forth my tale," he began importantly. "Your ladyship must know, that having been visited in the night-time by the Muse of Poesy, I arose me early and went forth, chewing as it were the cud of the flower that had come to me, on beholding your ladyship's shoon a-cleansing in the courtyard below." He struck an attitude. "This is the Flower, madam—

Chloe descending from High Heaven to earth,
Got her shoon fyled and eke her gold clocked hose,
But how came mud to sully hose and shoes,
Since Chloe treads on hearts where'er she goes?"

Lady Jean flounced over on her pillows

"Hold your fool's tongue, Dandy!" she commanded. "What I would know is, how came this white-faced brat into my Lord Aigyle's Lodging?"

"Ask it of your puppy, madam, trained to fetch and carry for his mistress, and not of me," retorted Chrystal, instinctive dislike of the shrewish, pale blue eyes and lascivious mouth instantly awake in

her "Sooth, I'll wad honest women would be little like to trouble you with their company, unless brought, like me, by force!"

The dame in the bed flung herself across the *ruelle* to aim a slap which, evaded by Chrystal's prompt spring, came with stinging vigour on Dandy Jock's face

"Sweet madam, put yourself not thus about," the lad, rueful hand on cheek, protested "I will learn my kinswoman better manners after five minutes with your chaplain. Suffer him but to be summoned, and the froward lass will find a husband has ways and means of enforcing authority"

Jean Gordon laughed jarringly.

"So best, Dandy!" she cried "The tocher will gild any stains no doubt on your wife, so summon Master Peter and we'll have this King's Butter rendered fit for honest housewives' use," she jeered

"'Tis a chance, ye trull, for which ye may thank my wish to avoid scandal, for nothing else would keep me from delating ye before the Presbytery as a woman of ill-fame, myself witness to seeing you, through the window, in the King's apartments at Embro!"

Chrystal's answer was prevented by the arrival of the chaplain whom Jock had scoured to fetch, and whose book-bleared eyes apparently saw nothing remarkable in the marriage of his patroness' gentleman-in-waiting with the quaint little figure before him

"The bride, though scantily in wedding garments, has yet doubtless been clad by Love," he observed shrewdly, glancing at the evident disguise "'Tis a runaway I doubt, but if your ladyship vouch for them none need boggle"

The bedchamber was filling with curious-eyed ladies, waiting-women, pages, all the meinie brought together at their mistress' demand for witnesses. Jock, smirking and important, took his place by Chrystal, as she faced the crowd with demure mien

"On wi' ye, Master Peter!" bade Lady Jean,

evidently surprised at the passive attitude of the bride "The lass is orphan, there's no obstacle"

"But one, craving your ladyship's pardon"

The girl's sweet voice thrilled through the room
The minister's look met hers with kind encouragement

"What's that one, my lass?"

"That I'm married already, sir, to Adam Gordon of Brackley!" quoth Chrystal, and savoured her mischief to the full

With a choked cry Jean Gordon fell back in the bed, her features writhen with spite

"Witnesses? Time? Place?" she champed the words between locked teeth

"My husband will answer all questions to any with right to ask them," Chrystal returned with provoking calm "Whether he will deem you the fitting person to put them, madam, is another question"

Lady Jean sprang out fairly on the floor

"I will hold my hand no longer!" she shrieked with a coarse word "Before you all I delate this tawpy as a wench of ill repute, fit to be dealt wi' by the Kantore! Myself from my Lodging in Leith Kirk-Gate saw her with the King"

"His Majesty, madam, could tell you no blushes need be bred of my business wi' him, when belike he could not say the same of the dame to whom the short-cut to his lodging was so well known!" retorted Chrystal at a venture, encouraged by the furtive smile making the round of the listening faces The minister interposed

"If your ladyship will make out your accusation, this is a matter for the Presbytery," he said "By your good leave I will be answerable for the young gentlewoman, and will hold counsel anent her case with the godly brethren brought together at Stirling by the times," he added, probably auguring small good to the girlish creature beside him, from the pale fury in Jean Gordon's countenance Chrystal followed him from the room, with an anxiety replaced by a hope as her conductor, instead of leaving the palace,

began to mount the stairs leading to the floors above. Two or three flights had to be climbed before he opened the door of a fair-sized room.

"My lord's Lodging is tolerably full, but I doubt the lady we have left would furnish you with worser space than this, my young mistress," he observed with a slight smile. "Here, though under the eaves, you will find yourself indifferent comfortable, I making interest for a share of one of my reverend brethren's beds. Meanwhile I would caution you here to bide, as being apt to be safer for ye than elsewhere."

The thoughts flitting through Chrystal's brain did not promise obedience to his suggestion. With the closing of the door she was at the window, to draw back discomfited before the steep slope of slates beneath. A tiptoe went she next into the corridor, but hurrying feet and loud voices betrayed the servants' quarters around. The tinkling notes of a harpsichord sounding through the wall interrupted the girl's meditations, the musician was next neighbours with her, he seemed tuning rather than performing, Chrystal wearied of the repeated broken strumming, a bar or two of a melody played again and again. In the silences of the tapping keys speakers could be heard, one thin and sharp, the other deeper with soothing tones. To the listener unable to catch the words an odd familiarity was in the voices, she wondered idly where she could have heard such trilled intonations. The tuning process and the wonderings had endured for the best part of an hour, when Chrystal stealing again to the door became aware that the lull of the dinner-hour prevailed through the house, and seized the opportunity for an exploring expedition. She had taken half a dozen steps when a door opened upon her, the musician of the chamber stepped out before the girl, starting back.

"*Ohme, Madonna Fair-face!*"

The Géois brothers, their weird resemblance notwithstanding, seemed strangely unlike to-day

Lazare's face was overcast, the ruminative eyes sullen, shifting. His repulsive twin, on the contrary, appeared in unusually good-humour, his white teeth showing in frequent smiles.

"Lazare Lazylegs, henceforth grumble not that thou art forced to climb so high to thy workshop, since the higher the nearer heaven!" he cried. "Here's madonna come to prove to thee that we are housed among the angels."

Displeased at his familiarity, Chrystal would have passed, but Gian Battista craned forward, speaking in a quick whisper—

"Has an angel come down to make heaven in a King's chamber?" he asked, the black eyes roving over the girl's disguise. "Will madonna stoop to the servants' quarters that she may rise to a high place?"

Startled by the insinuation in his words, his listener turned about to gain her room. The demi-man frowned.

"Pride, madonna, is the sin of the angels," he said. "Madonna is too proud, it seems, to trust the poor Italians who helped her in one strait—as perhaps they could help her in another!"

Chrystal paused again.

"What business have you in this house?"

"The mending of a harpsichord, madonna," Gian Battista responded. "'Tis for the King's apartments, and scarce needs a half-hour more of Lazare's fingers."

"And after, you may be heard of at the lodging in the Barras," Chrystal finished. "I would pay my debt!"—

"Chut! walls have ears!" Gian Battista's whisper checked the words on her lips. "Lazare, belike madonnetta," he went on, "would like to see the harpsichord. 'Tis a pretty piece of workmanship, inlaid curiously with chased brasses."

As though a magnetism lay in his intent look, the two he addressed obeyed mechanically, Genois stepping back to let Chrystal precede him into the

workroom The harpsichord, with the sunshine turning its brass inlayings to gold, stood in the centre of the floor, Lazare fingered the ivory keys while his twin spoke

"Walls have ears!" he repeated "Ill for you, ill for me, ill for the Signore Gordon of Brackley did the ears here glean aught of the making and taking of a certain key There is a fair-haired lady below would see to our payment"

"Does she know aught?" Chrystal asked, in a whisper low as his

"Should we be here if she did not? But you, madonna," he studied her with a peculiar sidelong look, "take as soon as may be my advice—and your leave, and speedy way to the meeting-place where the Cavaliere Gordon awaits you"

"Awaits me? What, he is safe, in Embro?" You have seen him—spoken with him?"

"And journeyed hither!" The demi-man's voice seemed to arrest words on Lazare's lips "Madonna sees she may put trust in the poor brothers, since they are good enough tools for a grand *signore*"

Chrystal's eyes on the harpsichord had the fixity of a thought "This is destined to the King's rooms?" she demanded

"The brose-and-beer swilling hogs below ought by this to be here to bear it thither" Gian-Battista watched with stealthy curiosity the thought growing in the girl's face It leaped to speech

"Could I not, concealed within it, go thither too?"

An intense malicious satisfaction flashed in the demi-man's eyes

"If madonna wills a secret conference unguessed at by all, 'tis the right thought" Lazare, art sleep-walking?" his steady look seemed to daunt a purpose coming to slow birth within his brother "To work, man His Majesty will bear you no grudge for gutting his harpsichord if thereby you put it in better condition than before to accompany sweet lips"

The sneer was obvious, but Chrystal could not quarrel with the chance that offered her the oppo-

tunity that an hour before had ranked among the things impossible Tremulous, she stood by during Lazare's evidently reluctant operations, and sprung into the hollow case at last with never a shudder for the coffin-like staitness Steps and voices in the corridor without told that Géniois' tardy movements had but just ended in time

The harpsichoid was raised from the ground, the feet of its bearers overpowering gasp or shift of cramped limb from the prisoner within Chrystal could distinguish Lazare's foreign tones in directions for the transit, then the door slammed, she felt herself travelling

Behind the door noisily flung to, the demi-man looked with a sinister smile in his brother's face

"Be not in haste, Lazare," he said in his Tuscan "Wait till his Majesty has had time to find out the pretty tune the harpsichord will play to him! The tune of *La Bella Ragazza*! Cio' brother, a dish of macaroni smacks as savoury though you do not burn your mouth over it!"

The other surveyed him with a strange horror

"What mean you, Gian Battista?"

"Chut! what avails to play the innocent? Can we coin gold that we can afford to throw away a pocketful? And the excellency with the eyes and lips that mean matter for the confessional will give gold to him who can show her Madonna Fan-face gone a-visiting!"

A sound between a sob and a curse broke from Géniois' lips

"This is not your earnest, Gian Battista? For the sake of gold you would not betray a child white and innocent as one of Maria's lilies?"

"A lily taking root in a strange bed! *Avè!* thou talkest bravely of treachery, brother mine, but dost think thou owest no fidelity to the excellency's salt, that thou shouldest shut mouth over a plot weaving unknown to her?"

"Peace with thy glozes! Salt! The excellency's

salt has been vinegar rather, acrid with her insolence and her gibes! *Madre!* and it is to such a one, spiteful as a scorpion among the logs, that thou wouldest hand over the girl she hates for jealousy's sake, as one woman can hate another for being this and that which she herself fain would be, and knows she is not!"

"The legs are thine, Lazare," Gian suggested mockingly "Thou canst bear thy poor brother hence—under the cloak none will note whether he goes willing or unwilling Hasten, Longlegs, perhaps thou wilt have made a half league before her excellency's servants overtake the poor Italians, whom their mistress was at noon to honour by hearing the tidings which they bring from Edinburgh!"

Lazare's heavy face was working with passion, he met the demi-man's stare with defiance Gian Battista's thin laugh crackled out

"He, he! another Orlando Furioso!" he cried "Gian Battista without arms and legs can do nought against so doughty a *cavaliere servente!* Nought—except one thing!"

"Thine old threat, Gian Battista!" But Génois had grown ghastly pale "Thou wilt kill thyself—the fear of me quick being linked to a rotting corpse, has kept me thy slave too long!"

"Ay, brother mine, Lawyer Death will scarce divorce us two! We die as we have lived—together!"

The other breathed quickly It seemed to him that he was fighting for his life, his soul

"Yoked to a curse from mother's womb I have borne it, dumb as ass the cross, but I will not shackle the curse upon my soul, as I should do did I suffer this treachery of thine! Chained as I am to thee, for once I thank the saints that so thou art to me, without me thou canst not work this wickedness! I move no foot on the traitor's road, Gian Battista, I will not help to bring shame, it may be death, on the child who trusted us!"

"Thou wilt not? Wilt not, fool, oaf, puppet to

whom I have been stings long enough to every day of my life ! ”

“ I will not—head ! ” retorted the other

“ Ho, ho, ho ! Lazare, I have found thee out ! Thou art in love, brother mine, in love with the damsel who has as many men dancing after her as were she the tarantella’s self ! ”

A dark flush crimsoned Génois’ forehead

“ Does a man love the stars or the saints ? ” he stammered His brother laughed vilely

“ A fallen star ! Saint Magdalene ! ”

A great blind anger, the garnered passion of a nature patient through the years, swept in on the Italian He grasped at the dagger in his belt, striking and striking again as a man rains blows at the evil threatening his life The weight at his side grew heavier, heavier yet, then his brain cleared From out the silence about him, were born sounds, the click of a woman’s heels, the swish of a woman’s skirts

A film passed away from Lazare Génois’ eyes, he saw, saw the dying look of the demi-man fixed on him with the old sneer The rustling skirts were at the door

“ To-day I,—to-morrow thou, Lazare, my friend ! ” gasped Gian Battista, and so died

CHAPTER XXI

THE KING'S START

THE harpsichord had reached its destination.

With a thud that came near to forcing a cry from its inmate, it had been set down, shoved here and there into position, then left. A careless voice spoke above Chrystal's head

"'Tis tuned to no livelier catch than a psalm, I warrant me. 'Wouns, I marvel how the Lords of the Covenant winked at the letting pass a worldly instrument to our prisoner's Lodging."

"My Lord Squinteyes has a daughter who has a white hand and a sweet voice for the harpsichord," returned another speaker. "And when a king stands by to turn the music, the squinting eyes see the crown on the fair musician's head." 'Fore God, George, the golden ointment which methinks Argyle has medicined your eyes with not once or twice of late, should have made you capable of seeing so much."

"Pshaw!" interrupted the other hastily. "My Norway peregrine to a Philip sparrow that the first hand laid on these keys is not the old squinter's daughter's, but that of his niece, that widow-woman whose weeds, like a tavern-sign, hang out a promise of bed and board for the first-comer in need of 'em!"

The men's laugh was checked by an opening door.

"Sir, like Felix, you bid me go my ways till a convenient season." The new voice was dogmatic, importunate. "But zeal is like a fire in my bones, it will consume me unless these ears shall hear you say, 'I repent!'"

"Sir, since you and your godly brotherhood have

dealt faithfully with me, it has come to me to repent right heartily—that I ever was born!" responded the King's mocking tones, the last words lost in the crash with which he threw back the lid of the harpsichord "Come, let's have a catch, I vow I am glad to see an instrument again Your preacher'ship shall have the choice—'Drink to me only with thine eyes,' or 'Ave Maria Purissima'!"

"Sir, is this your repentance?" demanded the spiritual adviser austere

"Why, even a dog's allowed to express sorrow in howls!" was the retort "But I might have known there was no music sweeter in a preacher's ears than his own voice!"

Before his evident ill-humour the minister seemed to think it wiser to withdraw, pausing only to invite the young men to the expoundation about to be held

"Nay, Wilmot, never baulk a desire with a duty!" Charles' mischievous tones overbore his attendant's objections "George, too, sure never king had so faithful friends, but the sacrifice is not needed, man, I know what sermons are to you! Go, I shall count on Villiers for the heads, and if the godly man prolongeth his discourse over supper-time, scruple not to miss it! Go both, I wish you joy of this worthy company, myself would liever be alone"

The freakish double-edged sentences died in a sigh as the curtains fell behind his reluctantly-departing companions

"Zounds, is there no way out of this accursed web myself has wound me in?" The muttered voice sounded close to Chrystal in her hiding-place "My plight worsens with each day, I am more helpless than the pulpit-cushions on which the preachers thump out their eloquence, since I, sitting under them, cannot even raise a dust!"

"You might yet raise a dust with the horse-hoofs of your speedy departure, sir!" a demure voice came from Chrystal's concealment She pushed up the lid of the harpsichord

"Oddsfish! Chrystal of Queer Havens! She has given Major Weir the slip again!" the King ejaculated

Chrystal extricated herself with difficulty from her cramped position

"Hush, sir!" she whispered with a shade of her husband's imperative gravity "I have wished much to come to you, not to play a game o' Davydrap, or to ask aught for myself, but to show you a way out of the web!"

He was silent enough now, the swarthy face older, harder in its intent listening

"What way, girl?"

"The road to the Highlands, sir!"

"Who sends you—Murray, Huntly, Athole?"

"Names are the headsman's help," Chrystal whispered, finger on lip "But he who sent me bade look on this ring"

The King regarded the sapphire signet with a clouding brow

"My Lord Montrose's ring as I see," he said "Well, child, since it would seem you're accredited agent, speak on!"

"Sir, all is ready, wanting the King!"

"The King's ready too!" Charles swore an oath "Time and place, my maid, is all I'm asking"

They talked in hurried whispers, each head canted in listening for sounds without

"The great hawking-party, which is pretext for carrying me to a securer prison in Dunfermline or Perth was fixed for the fourth of October," muttered the King at last "Three—four days hence, ay, ample time for a messenger to summon all may be for joining a King, stolen away easily enough in the thick of the chase, since there never was foal dropped yet—unless 'twere Death his pale horse—to outstrip my grey! There's but one hitch, Black Evan's tryst for the clans lies at over-great distance"

"Where the King is, the clans will come!"

An unusual eagerness transfigured the careless

countenance bent over the map which Charles produced from a *scrutoire*

"Clova!" he said, putting his finger on a certain spot "Ay, on the braes of Angus, yon's the spot, the better for being no fortified place for the Parliament's eyes to turn to, when they first find that, like the damsel in the ballants, I'm off to the Highlands!"

'I've kilted my coats of green satin,
I've kilted them up to the knee,'"

he trolled in a strong unmusical voice "'Twill be fortress enow, trow, when 'tis garrisoned by good Highland hearts! Clova! But will you back to Embro' and whisper that word in Lochiel's ears?"

Chrystal's face, raised in answer, paled in a sudden apprehension. A knock three times repeated, sounded behind the wall-panels. With the quickness of thought the King swung her off her feet, and popped her with scanty ceremony into the harpsichord again.

"My star rises early to-night," he observed coolly then, admitting Jean Gordon through the panels where the signals had grown imperative. Paler than her wont, she threw a hasty glance around.

"You have had company? I heard voices!"

"A voice, madam. As I live, but one!"

"But one?" The woman echoed the words with a sneer. "One's enough at a time!"

"More than enough at times, your ladyship," the King agreed.

Lady Jean's foot patted the floor.

"Oh, I take your Majesty," she cried. "You're tired of me, willing to be rid of me. Best make a clean sweep, man, and leave the field clear for Bess!"

"I hold my Lord Argyle's daughter dear, madam," put in Charles. The widow's rounded cheeks deepened in colour.

"Joy for my squinting uncle then!" she mocked. "So he's won, and the King of Scotland holds a child of his dear!"

"Why, dear enough, since toom pouches like

best to play the game for love, and the Lady Elizabeth's sweet company is not to be had under a crown ! ”

Jean Gordon threw herself into a chair with a discomfited grimace

“ Your company has put your Majesty in good humour ! ”

“ The best ! ” yawned the King

“ Gemini ! ” Lady Jean sneered “ Is there no imparting the art ? ”

“ I would not have your ladyship practise it, since it consists in leaving me ”

“ Leaving you ? Why so soon, man ? ”

“ He talked himself dry, as I had already found him, madam, or I doubt not he would be here still,” returned Charles, leaning his elbow on the harpsichord

“ He ? Who ? ”

“ Hee-haw, your ladyship, is the sound that brings the ministers most speakingly to my mind,” the King murmured casually

“ The ministers ? Was the voice one of the ministers ? ”

“ One has but just left me,” Charles drawled “ If your ladyship regrets lost opportunities, there is, as I know, a sermon a-preaching in the chapel ”

“ A minister ! ” The fact appeared to give the widow satisfaction

“ You have the harpsichord ? ” she remarked after a pause, in which she obviously revolved introduction of her errand “ ’Tis well, for to-morrow would not have brought it you ! Of the two-headed Italian shown to you yestreen, one in an access of rage or madness has killed the other ! ”

“ If ’twas that half-born imp, hell’s the merrier for a rogue the more,” was the heartless answer “ No need to trouble the hangman with the other wretch, he will die soon enough without fruiting the gallows-tree ! ”

“ He seems to have been struck dumb ! Not one word can be won from him ! ” responded Lady Jean, springing to her feet as though to escape the

subject "Come, I have a mind to try this their handiwork!"

"Better not, if there's a spirit within it to drive men to madness, who knows if it may not put fair ladies into choler"

"Out of the way I can sing better than e'er Bess!" cried the impetuous widow Charles moved aside with a bow

"So that our intercourse may die, as doth the swan in music! Your ladyship's voice will not lack listeners"

Jean paused in a discomfiture

"Nay, then, if your Majesty cares for our intercourse, you will do what I came to ask," she said in a cajoling voice "Ye'll mind yon whey-faced brat that was my good uncle's taste for you in Embro', whose mock modesty and insolence near cost you dear in Balmerino House?"

"Till you showed her what could be done through a window," suggested the King

"Small thanks had she in her pouch for me! Who but she is here in Stirling, and swearing that she has a tale for the Presbytery will make them put the King in stricter captivity than ever yet" Jean lied with her pale blue eyes fixed straight and steady on the face near her "And with the Italian craftsmen perishes the witnesses I looked to to give her the lie!"

"I should have thought your ladyship had means of your own to justify such a generosity," the King said drily

"Ay have I, but 'tis safer I should not appear in the matter," returned the woman quickly, missing his point "But a word from you will make Master Samuel Rutherford—who of all the ministers gathered here is of the most standing among them—see this matter in the light we would have him do"

"I like not the part of King's Evidence, madam," remarked Charles carelessly

"Hoots! Is your Majesty about to father a conscience at this time of day?" The pale blue

eyes were insolent "Bethink ye, man, if you won't speak, I will, and a bonny tale I'se have to tell!"

"Ay—of ladies and looking-glasses and women and windows!" said the King

Lady Jean ground her white teeth

"You dare me?" she screamed "I tell ye I would sit on the Cutty-stool in the Greyfriars below, a month of Sabbaths, rather than that the trumpery who thought no shame to encourage the hell-doomed traitor Grahame on his road to the gallows should escape her punishment!" The widow's countenance was convulsed with passion, she shook her balled hands in the King's face "Argyle and trimming Lorn are all for keeping fair with the Engagers and Malignants nowadays I cannot, as I had hoped, delate minx Chrystal on that count, but I can and I will bring the matter of the King's Butter before the Presbytery—and the deil spatter whom he will with the scandal thereof!"

The King, with his hands to his ears, showed his customary haste to appease feminine humours

"My love, if you deafen me you will deprive yourself of an obedient listener," he observed amusedly

"My conscience, like the devils which the travellers in Cathay tell us of, is easily scared off the field by noise—which should make us two equal, except in name"

The sarcastic tone dominated the woman "In name?" pouted she.

"Ay, madam, for I have not yet lost my good name," quoth Charles "So I pray you, 'roar me as gently as any sucking dove,' if you do not wish to make the household a party to our tête-à-tête"

"But you'll do as I wish? You will give private witness to Master Rutherford?"

The King shrugged his shoulders with a peculiar smile

"If it can't be otherwise, I suppose I must! Hold," as Jean showed signs of throwing herself on his shoulder, "you have not heard my terms!"

"Your terms?"

"Ay, my terms" Charles spoke low but dis-

tinctly "And they are—secrecy and relays of horses!"

Surprise seemed to have mastered Jean Gordon's voice, so loud a few moments back

"Oons!" the King was speaking again, "I am sick of this business of a throne, which furnishes as uneasy down-sitting as ever had schoolboy after birching"—

"Eh, my King of Hearts, no need of words between us!" The languishing voice with a note of eager triumph broke through his sentence "Love shall still be lord of all, as the song says, and your sojourn in bleak Scotland has taught you the value of a woman's devotion! Horses between here and St Andrews, where a sloop for France and freedom may best be come by—leave me to care for all! Once on French soil we can snap our fingers at the Parliament, and make our own terms—trust my squinting uncle to see that a niece as a queen is next best to a daughter! Long, long have I waited for this moment, when I should hear from your own lips that I am loved as I love!"

"Madam, yourself has said no need of words!" the King responded with unusual gravity

"Let it be deeds then!" murmured the woman, the rustle of silken skirts telling of her spring to her feet "I will forth, to speed the hour which shall bring us together!" The silks crackled as she turned about "Farewell till then, when next we meet it will be in no such prison as Argyle's Lodging, but in the greenwood where love will be free as the birds of the air"—

"Ay, to borrow a trick of flight from them thereafter!" interposed the King whimsically "Your ladyship will but be doing justice to remember then that 'twas not I pushed you to a step which you may come to rue"—

"*'The woman beguiled me,'* 'tis ever Adam's cuckoo cry!" interrupted the other voice jubilantly "What I have gained, I can keep, man, so I'll e'en take the risks of your ceasing to love me"—

"'Tis not possible, madam, that I should *cease* to love you!"

The mockery in the King's answer was lost on the dame. The silks told of their wearer casting herself bodily upon him.

"Fear not that I will turn cold, my King, as long as there's flesh on my bones, blood in my veins"—

"Or *my* crown on my head!" muttered Charles, endeavouring to extricate himself from the fervent embrace. "Be it on your own head, madam, but bear in mind you did not lack warning!"

The girl, listening to all from her hiding-place, ceased to do battle with her bewilderment. The King spoke on, but she could only dully realise the disappointment in store for the conspirators in the house on the Flodden-Wall. Her own peril weighed little with her, in face of the crushing blow which awaited her husband and his party.

The rustle of the silks and Jean Gordon's laugh, vibrant though hushed, cut through her stupor of amazement at length. The click of the panel closing behind the secret visitor was succeeded by a silence, with considerable effort Chrystal raised the lid of the harpsichord. She peeped through the chink, to behold Charles, his swarthy face purple with suppressed laughter, holding his sides as he lay back in a chair.

"Oddsfish! Scotland owed me this laugh!" he gasped, settling his black curls. "Come, my conspirator of the harpsichord, out with you, and tell me your thoughts on this new feature of our plot?"

"I have yet to understand it, sir," Chrystal answered. A chuckle shook the King's shoulders afresh.

"Our widow is off on a false trail, sweetheart, which though not laid by me will confuse the hunters, I'll throw a man, when they turn out with 'Yoicks, Stole away!' in the King's Chase!" he laughed. "My Lady Spitfire a-missing and the King a-missing too—there's as much arithmetic among the Parliament as will make enable them to take their oath

one and one make two ! The track to St Andrews with horses ordered at the stages will be easier perceived than the track to the Highlands, and by the time Argyle's huntsmen have run a vixen to earth, Fox Reynard himself will be snug with the clans at Clova ! ”

An unwonted seriousness blotted out the laughter in the black eyes

“ You'll not fail to bring the word to Lochiel ? ” he pressed “ Once with the clans we shall be too strong for the Parliament's teeth, and Noll Cromwell may have done me better service than he meant when he marched his troops across Tweed A crowned Stewart may once more prove the magnet to draw English steel to him, all loyalty cannot have yet been prayed out of England, and Argyle between two fires may well choose to throw in his lot with his King at the head of a Royalist army, who hold, too, such a pawn as the Honours, rather than fight longer for his own hand ! To Clova first, and then to see what terms can be come to between the Estates and the party with Crown and King Success hangs with you, *mignonne*,” he took Chrystal's hand in his, “ you have time, but not too much, to win to those who sped you here, and share with them the secret that the fourth of October is the day thrown for me to make a start for freedom ! So much of an interval will avail Black Evan to send out the good men and true who, you tell me, have been smuggled into Embro', to raise the Lowlands for King Charles, and to mass the clans on Clova ! In the gloaming you will scarce have difficulty in making a fitting unobserved, and if by ill-luck the gay Gordon widow pounce down on you, as kite on dove, you have a weapon to your hand, in a threat of betrayal of her purposed elopement should she not let you out of her claws ! So good-bye and good luck, sweet Chrystal, and wear this in memory of the time when you played Æsop his fable of the lion and the mouse with Charles of Scotland ! ”

With a flush for the ungraciousness of the action,

Chrystal withdrew a step from the man holding out a jewel

"Him whom I serve in serving you, sir, would be ill-pleased did his wedded wife take aught from the hand that raised no finger against the great Marquess' murder," she said gravely

"Married! Oddsfish, does the man know he's happy at last, pretty Chrystal? His name, since you hunt him servant of mine, is the point about him strange to me, for the rest, it is familiar enough that my servants should set up to be my judges!"

"Sir, your servants but let you know what your enemies think!" Chrystal interposed eagerly "Give me, instead of yon jewel, permission to but once say, it is unworthy to hide a frown with a smiling mask, such as is turned towards the Parliament—as was shown to yon madam! 'Tis unworthy to meet doubleness with doubleness, to outwit where one likes not to confront! Sir, can ye blame Brackley, my husband, for scorning reward, when 'tis the gibe in men's mouths that the King rewards his enemies!"

A dark flush rose to the King's forehead

"He must be a faithful servant who's willing to serve without wages," he said satirically "Tell your goodman from me, pretty one, that he's fortunate, since loyalty and friendship are luxuries kings cannot always afford" He laughed with his usual recklessness "Yet friends go cheap in the world's fair," he cried, "'tis a man's enemies he must buy at great price, never waste birdlime on the bird tame already!"

The withdrawal of the curtain covering the ante-room door checked Chrystal's parting curtsy. A white-haired man with a serenity in his shrewd, worn face, stood upon the threshold, looking from the pale girl to the young man, the shame-flush still lingering about the swarthy countenance

"Ye come unannounced, Master Rutherford, but none the less welcome," the King, first to recover himself, took the word "Be seated," he went

on boldly, "if ye had not come thus in the nick, I was about to send to request your counsel"

The charm of the Stewart manner worked, the sternness fading from the old man's expression

"Grace, mercy, and peace to your Majesty! If I have engine¹ to aid your Majesty, I would esteem myself happy, but if it is to yoke with Satan, we should draw but a crooked furrow!" He gave a grave look at Chrystal "A young man is often a drest lodging for the devil to dwell in, and it misdoubts me that he has put in a fair tenant here to keep the house garnished for him"

"Eh, Master Rutherford, do ye no' ken the daughter o' Clear Havens?" Chrystal cried with reproachful eyes The minister started up

"Chrystal o' Clear Havens?" he ejaculated "Bairn, your Christian father who is above the winter now, would be woe to hear the like of the child he left behind him!"

"My father might sorrow with me, not for me," returned Chrystal proudly "I have done a husband's will in coming hither to-day"

"As Master Rutherford will do Heaven's if he help her to get out," interposed the King "For the first subject who asked favour of me must not suffer scandal about the matter, unless it is a crime in Scotland for a king to redress wrong"

Rutherford rubbed his brows perplexedly

"Your Majesty is by position *parens patriæ*," said he "But to be plain, your Majesty is over young to be a judicious parent for this lass, whom I heard of last in the wardship of the faithful and godly elder, Major Weir of Edinburgh"

"Sir, I quitted him when I dared no longer abide," cried Chrystal "He was for marrying me by force on a kinsman of mine, whom my father thought ill of Major Weir's repute of godliness is all that is godly about him"

The minister held up his hand

"My heart, though I know it is no art to go through

¹ Power

the market as a saint among men, and yet steal quietly to hell without observation, yet* it beseems us not to be over brisk in our judgments, till the Day that shall bring us all out in our blacks and whites," he said in kindly reproof "How does this kinsman of yours call himself?"

"Sandy Hope" Chrystal pouted over the name A flash glowed for a moment in the aged eyes

"Yon was the name of the Arminian lown who with a breath o' his lying mouth blew me out o' fair Anwoth on the Solway," he cried, but checked his indignant outburst instantly

"The old man dies hard," he observed after a pause "Alexander Hope did but put the garland of the Cross on me, and here am I as hot as if he had done me an ill turn"

"Oddsfish, it was to defend herself from that same hopeful Sandy that was the lass' errand with me," put in Charles adroitly, giving Chrystal a compelling look to be silent "She deemed a King had power to put to the horn at pleasure, but a report has but now reached me that Sandy Hope is gone over to the English"

Rutherford seemed in thought

"The lass spoke of doing a husband's will in coming here," he remarked

"Ay, sir, I had another errand also My husband would have been here himself were he able 'Twas he that had cognisance of Sandy's treachery, of which his Majesty makes mention"

"This husband has a name as I suppose?"

"Adam Gordon of Brackley, sir I look to join him in Edinburgh"

The composed answers and the truthfulness of grey eyes carried weight A suspicion seemed to relax from Rutherford's brows

"If the Lord allow I journey myself to Edinburgh the morn, and will see you disposed of in safe hands, my child," he said, missing the quick glance of dismay exchanged between his hearers "So shall your Majesty's wishes as to the avoidance of scandal be

best compassed, and doubtless your Grace knows as well as I that hall-binks¹ in great houses are slippery abiding for young females”

“May she never be safer than under her King’s roof!” Charles spoke with rare earnestness “If more folk in Scotland trusted, as she, Charles Stewart, he would be a better man”

The old face grew very kindly as he regarded the young, gloomy one

“I wish your Majesty from the yolk and heart of my soul a better man,” Rutherford said with uncourtier-like honesty “Afflictions and trials have been your portion beyond your youth, but I verily think Heaven hath laid many oars in the water to fish and hunt home over Charles Stewart his heart to better things”

“If all Christians were more like you, Master Rutherford, I should not despair of seeing myself one some fine day!” exclaimed Charles, giving his hand with unusual graciousness “One of your ilk,” he went on with a whimsical gleam, “outweighs a ton of sermons—paper Christians are lightly made, but they neither wash nor wear! Farewell to you and the convoy whom you have pledged yourself to bring safe to Embro’”

The roguish eyes darted an arch look at Chrystal, reluctantly preparing to follow the bent figure of the minister, whose escort promised distinctly enough a vain vigil to Lochiel’s barge The King broke with seeming carelessness into a snatch of ballad—

“Oh waly, waly, my gay goss hawk,
Ye can baith speak and flee,
Ye sall carry a message to my luvie,
Bid him speed and answer me!”

he chanted, the harsh voice appeared to pursue Chrystal through the anteroom and down the stairs, before it was overborne in her ears by the trailing of a woman’s gown The next moment, Jean Gordon stood face to face with them

“His Majesty will have spoken— Ma certes!”

¹ Hall benches

The last words swept, as it were, her address to Rutherford from her lips, the pale blue eyes fixing themselves on Chrystal in a cruel stare

"Ye limmer! how come ye here? Ye tawpy, how dare ye break bonds and show your shameless face as though a nobleman's Lodging were haunt for your kind"—

"The matter which your ladyship told me that His Majesty had for mine ear, concerned the setting straight of the misconception which, I perceive, your ladyship harbours against the child of an ancient yoke-fellow of mine own," Rutherford interrupted the vixenish outpourings "Being crossed concerning her marriage, she appealed to the King's arbitration, and came to him this second time with a husband's goodwill"

Red passion-flowers bloomed on Chrystal's paleness at Lady Jean's laugh

"Charity has borrowed a napkin o' Justice to steak her e'en!" she cried "We'll see what the Presbytery will say to the moving story my young madam can tell it"—

"Of a ride to St Andrews and a French wind," put in Chrystal slowly "Ay, madam, we'll see what the Presbytery will have to say to the story I can tell it"

Jean Gordon staggered against the wall, staring, as though fascinated, into the grey eyes mercilessly fastened on hers Rutherford, uncomprehending of the byplay, intervened

"I will at need answer to the Presbytery for what I do," he remarked with a touch of dignity "That there is no cause to pursue this business further, I am ready to give Surety's act of cautionary"

He passed on his way with a salute, leaving Chrystal to follow Lady Jean clutched at her with a shaking hand, unhooking the purse at her girdle with the other

"You will swear—swear silence?" she whispered The girl moved from her in the complaisance of absolute contempt She pushed away the offered bribe

"I would as lieve sully my tongue with your doings, madam, as my hands with your gold!"

Flinging the words over her shoulder, she hastened after the minister already at the stairfoot, and passed unchallenged with him out into the street. Rutherford strode along at a round pace, his hand on her arm, as though the wistful glances cast in the direction of Forth had been traitors to Chrystal's futile wishes to evade her kindly conductor. Before a house standing back from the roadway he slackened off.

"The worthy lady dwelling here will give you good welcome," he observed, leading way between two rows of curiously polled oak-trees. His tirl at the rispin-pin was answered by a starched maid-servant, who, with an inquisitive look at the stranger, ushered them to a parlour off the stone-flagged hall. Of the two ladies within, one alone rose up to greet the minister, the other, dressed in a mourning habit, sat without looking up from the knotting-work in her fingers.

"She hath not spoken save to bid poll the oak-trees in the courtyard since the news o' thirtieth Januar' twalmonth," whispered the dame who had received them. "Ye and your charge are heartily welcome, sweet Master Rutherford, but I crave your leave to go see to the supper, which should be on the table before now."

Chrystal involuntarily followed her eyes to a time-piece, the tarnished gold of its dial showing through the deepening twilight. The hands pointed to twenty minutes past one.

"All the clocks in the house are stopped to the hour o' the heading," murmured the hostess. "Tioth, where time does not exist, the inhabitants of the place bude to be angels, for it just spells ruin to good housewifery!"

With the mutinous outburst she bustled from the room, leaving them to the company of the lady whose absolute silence seemed at last to work a spell, reducing the visitors to fascinated tongue-tied watch on the white fingers engaged in swift knotting passes. It

was a relief when candles heralded the arrival of the supper-table followed by the housekeeper letting down her gown from the pocket-holes as she came

"Sit by, friends," she ejaculated hospitably, on the heels of the blessing pronounced by the minister

"Gape and make a wide mouth, it's kitchen to my meal to see faces round the board once more, my sister taking nought but some bread and claret-wine in her bedchamber"

Chrystal involuntarily looked towards the knotting female She had risen, her eyes gleaming out of the dusky corner

"Sister!" a voice husky through disuse made the carver drop her knife, "what dish is yon before ye?"

"A calf's head, sister, dressed after a recipe from *The Queen's Closet Broke Open*," cried the other "Blithe will I be if ye are for nibbling a morsel"—

A shrill scream ended her sentence, as the black-robed dame advanced, to dash the dish bodily to the floor

"The vile Covenanting mess!" exclaimed the Royalist lady, exerting her recovered speech at the top of her lungs "Never while breath's in my body shall any in my house nourish themselves with the dish which the sacrilegious Puritans feast on, in ridicule of those who mourn the memory of our Blessed Martyr!"

The door slammed on her departing exit, leaving the astonished and disappointed guests free to console the less zealous sister, who, handkerchief in play, had sunk back in her elbow-chair

"Truly a scolding tongue is good for nought," she sobbed, "neither peace nor plenty, since it will not keep the one nor pickle for the other Hech, sirs, the King's head did a wheen mischief when it was off as well as on, for it's rolled between two fond titties!"

"Dear mistress, quaniel not with your sorrows," Rutherford admonished kindly "It is possible to gather gold by moonlight"

"Gold may be, Master Rutherford, but by sunlight or moonlight there's no gathering spilt gravy," his hostess sighed, stooping over the fallen dish. "Be thankit that the calf, poor thing, was the scapegoat, and that she bore no grudge against the collops or the Florence cream."

The interrupted supper was followed by an early bedtime, but Chrystal's schemes of a possible evasion to the vessel awaiting her coming, were baulked by her hostess taking her for a bedfellow. The Royalist sister had not appeared when in the dank autumn dawn the travellers bade farewell to their entertainer, Chrystal established on a pillion behind a learned and shy young candidate about to be introduced, under Rutherford's auspices, to the Edinburgh Synod.

The journey, dull enough, was but the canvas to the disturbed visions of the girl whose conductor, it was apparent, viewed her as a creature charged with dangerous possibilities, best dealt with by ignoring. The slow rate of travel suited to the capabilities of Samuel Rutherford, prematurely aged by the prison-austerities of what yet had been to him "Christ's palace of Aberdeen," chafed her unspeakably. Disquieting apprehensions that the minister would think it duty to leave her in safe-keeping in Embro' that would make it impossible in the limited time left to her to bear her message to the house on the Flodden-Wall, alternated with fears lest Adam, impatient over her non-arrival, might himself have left Edinburgh to seek for her. A prey to such tormenting reveries, she was yet conscious of an atmosphere of foreboding over the land through which they travelled, men exchanging hurried sentences with her companions as though warning them back on their road.

"Nay, I scar not to go forward!" Rutherford answered one such remonstrance. "Sectary though he be, Oliver Cromwell his words are yet true, 'no minister hath been molested in Scotland since the coming of the army'!"

There were more remonstrances at the inns in which they lay that night and the next, but Chrystal was glad that Rutherford's purpose remained firm. She herself was feverishly anxious to get forward, ridden as she was by a vague idea of evil, the more terrible because formless. The walls of the city were hailed by her, as though once within she would shake off the haunting fear.

No opposition was offered to the entrance of the new-comers, by the men in buff coats and steel caps guarding the town gates. Straggling returns of twos and threes were the order of things, the citizens, repenting at leisure their flight from the city before the coming of the Englishry, daily stealing back in increasing numbers. The streets with reopening booths looked familiar to Chrystal as she rode along, trying to frame a sentence that would rid her of her unwelcome escort.

A clamour of street urchins rose shrill above the hoof-beats. Down a street intersecting the riders' way came an impish frolic, ill-conditioned boys, long-legged girls, little children running and shouting with malicious glee, in the lust of the hunt hounding on some helpless creature. Snatching with tormenting hands, stimulating the hunted flight with sticks and stones, blocking the way of escape with outspread arms and mocking voices, the train whirled down the roadway, then Chrystal from her pillion saw over heads. The heart of the baiting was a woman, and the face half hidden by the grey hair that streamed over her shoulders was that of Grizel Weir.

CHAPTER XXII

THE DANCE OF DEATH

THE candidate gasped

The girl behind him but a moment since, had slipped from the pillion, had thrown herself bodily into the fray, as he looked she rose on tiptoe to administer a cuff to a lad head and shoulders above her, who had provoked a cry from the quarry by merciless tugs at the wild grey hair

"Take yon for wage for misusing a daft woman!" cried Chrystal, with the vigour that Dandy Jock knew. Then her arms went about Grizel with a maternal protectiveness of clasp. "Poor Grizel," she soothed, "'tis I, Chrystal, come to take you home. Ye ken Chrystal, Grizel?" She and you were aye chief."

Under the sweet voice something of composure came to the hunted creature, she raised a hand to feel for the mutch lost from the downfallen hair, and looked furtively after her tormentors, in retreat from Rutherford's rebukes and the Jeddart arguments applied by his and the candidate's staves. The aspect of gowns and bands appeared to infuse confidence to Grizel, she pointed at them

"Yon godly men will not let me be heided to hell, a'm no' trysted there yet!" she whispered

"Sir, 'tis Grizel, Grizel Weir!" Chrystal cried to Rutherford. "How came ye so far from the Bow-head, Grizel?" she asked

The woman, twisting up her hair and restoring order to her dress, raised eyes with a helpless appeal in them

"Brother Thomas is sick, and the neighbours do not come about as they are wont," she said "I

have been to one and another, and each bid me go further, till I fell in wi' the deil's hunt, and they catched me up like a dry leaf and whirled me awa' hellward ' ' "

"She cannot be left her lone ' I will bide with her ' "

The words escaped from Chrystal on an impulse of pure pity, but their sound flashed back to her the thought that in the hasty resolution lay the germ of the opportunity which had been the cause of such fruitless brain-cudgellings since she had left Argyle's Lodging. She felt herself half a traitor as Rutherford smiled on her.

"My heart, you have my advice so to do ' You will be well employed tending Christ in His forlorn creature, and when my business with the Presbytery suffers me to go abroad, my endeavours shall not be wanting to reconcile that plea¹ between you and Master Weir and the husband ye have chosen to yourself," he promised, turning his horse's head with the alacrity of a busy man, who believes one matter at least to be satisfactorily discharged. Grizel's hand, like a fetter on Chrystal's arm, kept the gulf to her resolution.

"Come! *He* may be wanting me, and I would not he should send *the staff* to go seek me ' " she whispered at the girl's ear.

Chrystal yielded to the imperative hand, to stop with a gasp in her throat. The street which they stood in fell away sharply, on the level below she had seen for a single moment the sallow countenance of Sandy Hope. Gone as soon as glimpsed, in the street buzzing like a hive the spare figure had glided from her ken. A moment, yet a moment in which Tod Sandy's eyes cast round in a passing glance had rested on her.

Chrystal was glad to follow Grizel's lead, away from the evil omen that had crossed her path. She heaved a great glad sigh at the recollection that, once over the threshold of the house on the Flodden-Wall, she would step within the magic circle of her husband's arms. A sudden impatience of the autumn

¹ Quaiiel

sunlight took her, she wished the night at hand, the night that would see this her last errand accomplished, and Adam met with Notwithstanding, with a shrinking fear like the breath of a haer sapping the sunshine of her hopes, she turned with a quick question to Guizel

"Did ye steek the house-door behind ye the morn ?"

A key drawn from the woman's bosom was sufficiently eloquent answer. Tod Sandy would not be lurking in the shadows of the house in the West Bow, the assurance of the locked door gave Chrystal patience to pursue the roundabout road chosen by her companion in preference to the teeming thoroughfare hateful for the memory of the morning's terror.

The thoroughfare which had nods and becks for a crazed woman with distraught gestures, had none for the figure that had vanished from Chrystal's sight. Tod Sandy eeled through the crowd with gliding haste, his unobtrusive passage left no wake of staring faces as he steered for the Cowgate. He went fast, but not too fast for a back look assuring him that the women, black against the blue of an October sky, had turned away along the higher ground.

"Ay, Chrystal, I'se be in time to ensure ye your welcome home," he muttered, sliding into the close which should bring him to that rear-entrance from the Cowgate, of the house in the Bow above, as a cuttlefish might shoot into his home-crevice in the rocks.

Yet Sandy, stealing up the turret-stair, halted midway. A voice, raised in rapid speech, came down to him, the hairs upon his flesh pricked as he stood still to listen.

"Ha, the dainty pair that ran fast, but they could not outrun me ! The race is done, pretty marrows, and 'twas I bore the prize away ! Here are boots and spurs to company with ye, but the spurs have grown rusty since the feet that owned them took the road there's no turning back from ! There was a struggle in which these clogs bruised sore, I mind me, but the conventicle had been long and dreary, and

I was little inclined to be baulked by a lass' whims ' She told no tale of her night when they found her in the morning with black marks of a hand on her throat, and who but the godly Major was thronged at by the good folk to aroint the house in which the Enemy had wrought such a deadly deed ' " The mutterings grew hoarse and low, then they rose again " The fair lad who stepped in these botews—his face haunted me for a space,"—a harsh laugh interrupted the unseen speaker,—“at least his soul was whiter than if he had lived longer in the godly nurture of Major Weir's household ' ”

Step by step, stair by stair, Sandy had crept to the threshold over which the hurried feverish sentences flowed Major Weir, gaunt in nightgown and cap, was kneeling over the boots and shoes which he arranged in twos upon the floor As the spy peeped through the crack, he sprang up, placing himself beside a pair of woman's slippers at the head of the weird procession

“No need to bid you keep step with me, Alice's shoon, for ye were wont to follow me up and down like a spaniel dog ' ” he cried, glancing at the worn satins “Come one, come all, I'll go to the place prepared for me with as brave a following as chief, Pope, or devil ' ”

Whistling a march, he moved his feet in time to it, fever-madness alight in the eyes flaming in his grim unshorn face A shiver ran over the Border-man's body, but he set his teeth on it, step by step gliding backwards till the door of the dark tower once more lay between him and the uncanny figure heading his Dance of Death The red-haired man wiped sweat from his forehead before he lifted hand to knock at the turret door To knock till, breaking the most imperious summons in half, the door swung backwards with dumb invitation

The voice had fallen silent as Tod Sandy for the second time that day climbed the stairs The great heap of foot-gear swept against the wall was the first object encountered by his cunning look, before

it was claimed by the black caverned eyes of the man upright in the four-post bed with its poles naked as a gallows-tree. The look exchanged between the two was long and questioning, then the Hope spoke.

"'Twill be to help tend ye in your sickness, I doubt, that Mistress Chrystal is back to ye?" he said, observing with satisfaction the second's flash of surprise on Weir's face. "If she knew as muckle against me as she kens against ye, Master Weir, the lass should find the winning into my house a hantle easier than the winning out!"

The words, chosen and launched with care, seemed to fall powerless against his hearer's silence. The burning eyes alone demanded further speech.

"A friend's warning is worth somewhat!" the fawning voice broke the pause at last.

"What would you? The lass?"

Sandy started at the hoarse weak voice, betraying the ravages of illness. Insensibly he himself assumed a bolder tone.

"Na, na! After Esmé Dare-the-Deil—for none other could have told the tale anent me he did—and the gallant Cavalier she fell in wi' next, the lass will scarce serve Sandy's turn!" the Hope sneered. "A'm just asking back my share in the fourfold bargain ye made o' your waid, Major Weir, and as muckle gold to the back o' that as will seal my lips to silence thereanent, as the dead-wife seals a corp's eyelids wi' penny-pieces!"

"Asking is light work!" retorted the sick man. Tod Sandy drew a paper from his pocket.

"Then I'se e'en take my ways to the Presbytery, and ask them what's the worth o' this billet received by the godly Master Weir," he said composedly. "Or maybe, as ye yourself are reputed among the best instructed in heavenly things, ye could be for answering a question o' earthly ones?—taking into your considers the market value o' King's Butter!"

A gleam of baffled hate leapt into the eyes fastened on the billet held by Sandy at arm's-length from the bed. For once Major Weir's strength had failed.

him, no help to overcome the dangerous adversary could be looked for from muscle or will sapped by fever

"You have, as I own, cause of offence against me," his slow words came at last, in his voice the tone of frank humility which the prayer-assembly knew "This sickness has shown me much of evil in me, and from my heart I crave your pardon"

"Ay, gossip, 'tis yours—for a price!" quoth Tod Sandy

The other lay back, the lids falling over his hollow eyes

"I am not strong enough at this present to transact business," he whispered, moistening his dry lips

"The morrow, as I trust, I shall be better able to render ye your dues, and will look for you towards the evening"

The listening face with closed eyes seemed to anticipate the acquiescence which came with no more than a brief hesitation from Sandy's lips

"There's those would nick me fool for trusting ye, Major Weir," said he then "But the risk's mine, as the danger will be yours, if ye think to play me false" He turned to the door, but stopped "Ye'll keep the lass?" he asked, with a sly glance over his shoulder

The man in the bed was crouched upright, head craned forward, the sombie eyes fixed on a point to Sandy's left He stole out a hand in a stealthy gesture

"Look!" he muttered "Alice's shoon are coming for me! *Hear ye not? See ye not?*"

The other's startled glance followed the gesture, but the pointing finger dwelt for a second only on the worn satin shoes slipped a space from the pile Footsteps were approaching, possibly those of some godly visitor likely to have scant favour for one so recently blazoned to the West Bow as Sidserff of Brechin's tool Without another look at the man writhing in his delirium, Tod Sandy crept from the room, sped by a great cry that followed him

"Alice woman, Alice, the gulf yawns at your foot—you cannot cross it as little as may I!"

Chrystal Gordon on the threshold of that entrance leading from the hall, shrank before the fierce despair in the eyes fastened on her entering figure. The influence which saintly Rutherford's genuine Christianity had exercised, was needful to overcome the terror that shook the slight creature. "How came this sickness on him?" she demanded of Grizel.

"He has scarce been himself since the night of the carrying-off o' you!" responded the other. "The neighbours seem askance wi' us, and more than once he has cried out that it is the beginning of the end! He has kept himself much abroad, going up and down on matters political, and in the night o' Tuesday he came home, already in the fever-grips. One *Burn* was named in his hearing," she whispered, "so much I know from his ravings. 'Tis aye the word o' dread wi' him, remembering the coeven of Dalkeith!"

The wild mocking tones which had rung after Lochiel's party, sounded again in Chrystal's ears, baffling efforts to soothe. Wilder, fiercer, louder, the delirium waxed, till Grizel almost forced the girl from the room.

"Those who listen at the chink o' hell's door hear ill things!" she said. "And the door is ajeer the now!"

Chrystal stood irresolute. Daylight was fading from the world, already it was safe for a wayfarer to steal along the darkening streets to knock, not loud or often, at the door of a house on the Flodden-Wall. Yet the thought of happiness waiting for her in a husband's arms must not, to Chrystal's unselfishness, be purchased by abandoning forlorn Grizel in her need. She had time yet to shorten the sister's night-watch by some hours, and the girl resolved upon communicating the poor creature's need to Rutherford on the morrow.

"Who was the lass-bairn with Major Weir the night of his sickness?" she asked suddenly.

which to Chrystal was an odd reminder of the way in which he had clasped the little sleeping child. She dreaded an examination as to the events of the last weeks, but the sentence with which he turned at the door was not what she had expected.

"Chrystal Hope, I do not choose that you should abide longer in the room which has witnessed comings and goings little befitting your modesty! From now out you will sleep in one of the upper chambers," he said, the imperious mandate and its insinuation wakening defiance in Adam Gordon's wife. But with the opening of the pretty lips caution came to seal them. Chrystal spoke with guile.

"Deed, sir, sleep and I will have little foregathering this night, if I must bide my lone among the rats and mice," she exclaimed. "Let me at the least have for bedfellow the bairnie I met below an hour since."

Major Weir drew a step nearer Chrystal, looking her down with his dark stare. No word was spoken, yet she shrank and paled, she was powerless to turn her eyes from the look by which for long moments he held her, before at last he turned away, leaving the women listening to his slow receding footsteps on the stairs.

"What means it?"

Chrystal asked the question, barely above breath, but Grizel hushed her with the gesture of one interrupted in hearkening. Insensibly the obsession of her attitude infected the girl, listening, dumbly listening, the two crouched in the lessening fireglow, starting at every fall of the dead embers.

The grate had grown black and empty, as a heart in which the passions have burnt themselves out, before Chrystal wrenched herself from listening for what she knew not. No hindrance now opposed itself to her going forth on her errand to the house on the wall, she was about to rise to her feet, when Grizel's hand shot out, dragging her to crouch by her again. Through the dumb house a sound had risen, a slow, rumbling vibration through the boards, through the watchers' selves.

"*What's yon ?*" Chrystal whispered, and the woman beside her set her spindle a-dance

"'Tis the noise o' the besom sweeping out o' sight the ravellings o' this day's spinning," she said "I hearkened for't, that I might know the name o' the sin I span !"

"The name ?"

Grizel let her head sink on her hands

"It has a wheen names," said she "For I call it Gibbet-Seed, and brother Thomas calls it Keeper o' Secrets, but the lave o' the folks call it plain Murder !"

The last word, low breathed, lifted Chrystal to her feet, hunted her across the floor She wrenched wildly at the door, it yielded, she was on the threshold when a cry from Grizel made her fling herself back from a verge of unfathomable blackness *The staircase was gone !*

With eyes slowly using themselves to the gloom, Chrystal stood fixed on the verge over which it had missed so little of her plunging headlong Out of the depths, like some huge kraken rearing to strike at a shuddering victim, the outlines of a great spiral screw grew slowly visible, evident support of the strangely vibrating staircase capable of so suddenly and utterly being swept from view With the realisation another thought sprang into Chrystal's brain She was a prisoner Frenzied by the conviction, she rushed back into the living-room, ranging up and down like a creature possessed To and fro she went over the dividing line white in the glimmering candle-shine, now flinging her body half over the window-sill, now running in futile hope to the door, always madly refusing to face the fear that the night and the morrow should pass and find her a prisoner still Minutes made hours, each one long as two

But the fear would not be denied It lurked in ambush through the night, but it grew bolder with the morning Chrystal turned from it, but it pursued her, and looked her in the eyes

The woman spinning in the chimney-nook appeared to have sunk into a trance in which nothing of her

was living but her flitting fingers. No response was in her to Chrystal's passion, the slow hours crept on, each adding to the strength of the fear with which the girl wrestled now in blind desperate combat. Chrystal barred the door against the entrance of the dark master, but the silence of the house remained unbroken by the creak of the revolving staircase, the stones of the courtyard seemed to mouth at her in derision of the despair in which again and again she returned to the casements, ready almost to hear a friend's voice in the temptation to end all by casting herself down. Accompanied by a mad woman and a fear, the child could endure no more, the day appeared to rise about her like relentless flood, stocking the life in her pulses, swelling, swelling ever, sending a tumult of waters to steal thought from her brain, breath from her breast. Waters of healing, a blessed Lethe of unconsciousness.

The day had passed its prime when the life in her came to hand-grips with the swoon. The painful reviving banished thought for moments yet, but then she crept dizzily doorwards, to undo the fastenings. The sight of the yawning cavity sent her back hopeless, her fear clutched her by the throat.

Chrystal, leaning from the window, shrieked in her agony. Visions of a slow death by hunger and thirst, mingled with those of a King cursing her for the shipwreck of his hopes, of Royalists holding her blood-guilty of such traitor's death as Montrose had been put to by a triumphant Parliament, of Adam Gordon searching in vain for the wife whom he might well come to deem unfaithful. Under the pang of it all, she shrieked and shrieked again, but even if her cries sufficed to pierce the withdrawn court, the thin sound could not override that hammering of the smiths that reigned from light to dark through the length of the West Bow. Chrystal ceased at last. Spent with anguish, she lay listlessly across the sill, when a sound from below penetrated the numb brain. A careless swaggering laugh telling of

a man in wine, it nevertheless set her heart wildly athrob with hope

"Esmé! Esmé! To me!" Chrystal called "Esmé! Esmé! Esmé!"

The shuicks hoarse from the strained throat came faintly to the ears of the man they called upon Esmé Dare-the-Deil, harder and more reckless-faced for the hope he had left dead in Cawdion Woods, turned short on the man with whom he had been an hour or so in talk

"Your caged bud sings loud, Master Love-all-Men-and-some-Women!" he said thickly Major Weir did not avoid the look of the drink-reddened blue eyes

"As I have told you, my sister Grizel is in her fits," he said "'Tis to keep the neighbours' curiosity from her that, as you have seen, I have lifted the stair-case, devised for such a purpose"

"More like to keep her from the neighbours, who it is convenient should know no more of you than your saintship!" retorted his hearer

"Esmé! Help! Esmé!"

The man lurched to his feet

"Split me! she calls my name!"

"As a popinjay repeating a word gleaned from other lips," rejoined Weir "I tell you again that Grizel's fits came on her when, I being sick in my bed, your kinsman Sandy burst in with armed companions and rent the maid Chrystal away with violence She went shrieking on you to the last, and my wretched sister has not ceased to echo it!"

Esmé rushed down the false track

"My name? Ay, man, but why not that o' her gay long-curled lover?"

"Whose desertion drove her to take refuge once more in my house?" completed the other

A drinking-glass stood at Esmé's elbow Filling it to the brim he raised it to his lips with a steady hand, imprinting a smacking kiss on its edge

"Farewell to the clan o' ye!" he cried, and tossed it over his shoulder "For fient a drop o' blood-red

wine shall wet my thiapple till I've drained the last drop of wine-red blood from the veins o' the men who used and ill-used Chrystal Hope for their own ends ! So first Sandy Hope, brother," he shouted, bending the blade snatched from his scabbard, "for by the lass I love, here's a spigot to make yon wine run ! "

"I will be no party to violence," Major Weir with sombre sternness returned "I did but seek you out to-day for the sake of my former covenant with you, though most folk would deem me fully loosed from it, you having borne off the guil once already, through my connivance In the hope that your remonstrance might stay your kinsman from his contemplated villainy, I went in search of you, and in consideration of the danger (which though diminished since the town's occupancy by Cromwell, still exists) of your recognition as a breaker-out of the Tolbooth, will further myself undertake the task of learning where may Sandy Hope be found for reasonable discourse, if you will give me your word to abide me here ! "

"Your sickness has marvellously purged you of your sour humour, brother," Esmé snapped ungratefully "You are of a sudden of the kidney of the dad in the plays, who, after banning and blustering through four acts, falls to blessing with as lusty goodwill in the fifth, but banning or blessing, 'tis play-acting still ! You walk in over crooked paths for me to see to the end of, but I can guess that befriending me you think will be a better job than taking part with the Tod ! So away with you to find Sandy ! I'll wager that the discourse I have for him will be two-edged, pointed, and unanswerable as any preacher's ! "

The sinister threat in the last words seemed to go unmarked by the hearer Wrapping himself in his great cloak, he moved to the door opening on the turret-stair, disappearing through the door with a grave sign of leave-taking to the young man leaning on the naked sword Major Weir climbed down the stair and stepped out into the deserted alley with his

composed carriage, but his illness had loosened the iron bands in which the secret man for long years had held himself

“Do my work, drunken fool, and earn my wage!” The lips muttering shaped the words “Sandy will find another than he looked for at the tryst, and steel, not gold, will apay his threats to Thomas Weir. The deed done, the fruit of graceless Esmé’s taunts and gibes will ripen under sun and moon on the gallows-tree, for I myself will delate him of his kinsman’s murder, and that this night! And to-morrow—to-morrow for maid Chrystal!”

With lips moving in the devil’s litany, the tall form entered the Cowgate, turning as he went to cast a last dark look towards the room where Esmé had resigned himself to waiting for the tidings of his villainous kinsman’s whereabouts. The screams had ceased, no recollection of them came to stir the heaviness in which the young man had sunk. Playing with restless fingers on his sword, his fierce eyes faced a pain as they would have done an adversary, out of the mind’s thoughts he spoke, half aloud—

“Not for me—ay, the birds are singing it in Cawdron Woods! She haunts me, looking in my face and love for another shining in her eyes. The love has burnt itself out by now, I’ll wad, but it will be there in my sight o’ ye till I die, for there’s that in me tells me you’re not one to love twice! He shall pay with a wound for every kiss he took from you—so much joy life has for me still! To save you and die for you, Chrystal, ’tis the one boon Heaven could give me, for burn me! if I would see your sweet eyes again, the sorrow in them would thrust through my heart sorer than even the love they shine wi’ as ye stand haunting me there—love that’s not for me!”

Footsteps that were at once stealthy and eager broke in upon his heavy meditations. With their coming, Esmé raised his head, his nostrils fluttered, the records of a wasted life seemed to fade from a face grown suddenly stern and keen. The upright

motionless figure with the naked sword might well have been an apparition of vengeance to the eyes of the foxy-faced man sliding into the room from the turret-stair

With a great shout Esmé sprang on him, driving him at the sword-point down the room, where there could be no retreat. The shining blade seemed multiplied in Sandy's sight, it played about him, pricking him here and there, as a bull is pricked to show fight in the bull-ring.

"Dare-the-Deil! 'Tis Dare-the-Deil! Esmé man, for the sake o' the Hope blood that's in your veins as well as mine, have mercy!" he stammered as a man bewildered, and fell on his knees.

"Die fighting!" The terrible blade goaded him to his feet. "'Tis the one grace ye'll have from me, for by my mother's soul I've sworn your death!"

With the sullen despair of the bull at bay, Sandy stood on the defensive. The weapon drawn from his belt had drunk blood before now, the feel of its hilt did something towards dissipating the stupefaction that had taken possession of him. With sheer strength he beat off Esmé's assault at the first, but the younger man's science balked him, time after time his blade was paralysed, driven out of line, entangled with his opponent's. The red-haired man was fighting for his life, his breath came snarlingly, the green eyes were bloodshot. A stinging pain flew from wrist to elbow, his fingers closed on emptiness, with dull curiosity he watched his sword gleaming through the air, striking against a panel of the wainscoting as it fell. With a curse Esmé was upon him—to give back. The weaponless man had turned, grasping at the conqueror's blade in his bare hands.

"Kill me if ye will!" he shrieked. "But let me live long enough to bring vengeance on Major Weir!"

Esmé stared. The bloodshot eyes were fixed on a point behind him, his look turned to follow them. Above the fallen rapier a panel, apparently released by the weapon having struck its spring, had slid

back from a secret place, the shining of go'd and gems glimmered into the chamber

Heedless of the blood dripping from his hands, Sandy was ransacking the contents, one by one drawing out Lady Jean's jewels, as a man revives by fragments a long-lost memory His kinsman gasped at him roughly

"'Od rot me, if I don't find the killing of an unarmed man a tougher job than a weaponed one!" he cried "Ye shall have your life as payment for the pain of speaking truth for once, if ye'll tell me Chrystal's whereabouts!"

"Ask it of Major Weir, Esmé!" Tod Sandy made answer, his returning composure scattered to the wind by the step the other took on him

"Will ye deny ye carried her thence two night's back?"

The bloodshot eyes were bloodshot still as the red-haired man met the challenging look

"A'm thinking I'm not the only Hope born to be fooled by Major Weir!" he said slowly, holding out Lorn's billet to Esmé "If yon's the tale the Saint of the Bow has for ye, maybe there's that in the bit screed will make ye doubtful of how much his word may outweigh mine"

"Roast me and baste me' if I can make aught of it!" returned the young man, contemplating the writing with a puzzled face "There's neither head nor tail to it!"—

"Ay, Esme, there's a tale!" interrupted his cousin "A tale of how a godly man brought a lass to town that he might sell her as a King's mistress!"—

"Sell your tongue to Hornie, for, faith, it outlies his own!" shouted the other fiercely "Do ye dare to mint!"—

Tod Sandy moved deprecatingly

"All that's bought is not sold, Esmé! If it were, Chrystal Hope and I would be man and wife this day, for Major Weir had good gold from me to hand her over"

"To you? To me, ye mean, man!"

"Ay, Esmé, then ye have her in your keeping be-like?" retorted the other unmovedly "Or maybe Dandy is the groom, for I ken that Major Weir did not leave him out of the bidding when Chrystal was in the market!"

"Where is she, in God's name?"

"In this house, if Thomas Weir's the man I take him to be," returned Sandy "For yestermorn I spied the lass making hither in company of the mad woman his sister, and Major Weir thinks it worth his while to hold her fast"

He broke off at Esmé's rush to the doorway

"Esmé, Esmé! slow and sure is better than fast and fail!" he cried, in tones of genuine remonstrance "If Major Weir finds you breaking bolts and running guliavage through his dwelling-place, think ye not that he will speedily have ye laid by the heels as a housebreaker, and strung up thereafter out of harm's and his way?"

He paused, his eyes fixed craftily on Esmé's face

"But if the Edinburgh mob unfurled the Blue Blanket and came to break into the house, Chrystal could be rescued, for the master would have enough to do to save his skin"

The young man shook off the detaining hand

"What means have I of inflaming a mob against Major Weir, called of men the Saint of the West Bow?"

"Ye have a witness!" responded Tod Sandy, touching his own breast "A witness to put Master Weir in a cleft stick, charging him with no crimes civil or political, for with Cromwell in the city the magistrates' hands are tied from dealing with the tane, and with three parties in Scotland he could lightly enough win clear of the tither!"

The whispered tones seemed to echo in Esmé's voice

"What charge have ye to bring?"

"*That of wizardry!*" said Tod Sandy

CHAPTER XXIII

CONFESSION

"WITCHCRAFT ! Tod, ye'ie an ill man to baulk or bind, but yon's not earnest wi' ye ! Witchcraft ! Tod, 'twas the word bied by your revenge wi' ye but there's no truth to it ? "

"As little as in hell ! "

"Little enough there, in the lairs' roost ! "

"As much then ! If you believe in hell, believe in me and in Major Weir's witchcraft ! "

The word, inexorably spoken, seemed to maim Esmé's blusterings. He stared into the twilight with a face that was ashen.

"Witchcraft ! " he muttered "That means to be worried at the stake,—to die in a deathsheet of roasting flesh ! " He shuddered "Split me, Sandy, if I can set the dogs on a living creature for that fate ! sinner though he be, my own sins bid me show mercy "

"To all save one, Esmé ! "

"To that one too, though your exception be von devil's saint, Weir ! "

"Your exception, lad, would seem to be—Chrystal Hope ! "

At the name in the fawning voice, Esme cried out sharply. The eyes, apparently never lifted from the jewels over which the Borderman's hands lingered missed no change in the other's face.

"Od rot me ! I had forgotten Chrystal ! "

"The lamb in the wolf's jaws ! Ye'll no' can save the lamb without striking down the wolf ! "

Tod Sandy knew, by the curse that answered him that his instrument was tempered to his hand

For moments yet they stood in the darkening room, the red-haired man showing how the handful of followers still left with Esmé in Edinburgh, might best, instructed and dispersed, direct the inflammable Embro' mob on the house in the West Bow. The work, to be successful, would need time, before midnight the act of rescue—it was thus that Tod Sandy presented his subtly-planned revenge to Esmé—could scarcely be looked for, but Sandy pledged himself to hold Major Weir in play, his presence in the house, he asserted, securing Chrystal from present harm. His glibness strained his hearer's patience sorely, Esmé's blood was in spate before, released at last, he dashed from the room, the house, watched with a small smile by the man whom he had entered that house to kill.

Tod Sandy waited as his kinsman had waited before him, and the room grew dark. The small smile roosted on his lips, he sat as though the greenish eyes had cat's sight for the darkness, the crafty look turned on the door through which the turret-stair showed, a blacker depth. He sat waiting, and when he heard footsteps and the tapping of a staff he did not cease to smile.

Major Weir, groping up the turret-stair, paused on the threshold as though listening, a dark shape in the dark.

"Esmé Hope?" he said, and again, "Esme Hope?"

Sandy smiled still. The man for whom he waited stepped farther into the room, by the grating of the staff over the floor it seemed to be probing the dark in search of something that should be lying there, stretched out. Tod Sandy spoke, something suddenly.

"Ye'll be looking for my corp, gossip?" he said.

The smile faded before the silence that was broken only by the crackle of flint on steel. A light sparkled out, light which revealed nothing to the greenish eyes, watchful though they were of the face that the seemings of a life had moulded to be mask for the man within. Inscrutable as ever, Major Weir met the green eyes.

“What mean you?” he asked

The question, with the hint of contempt in its tone, seemed to irritate the Borderman. He got on his legs as though to avoid the domination of the tall man standing over him.

“I mean that once fooled is commonly enough for me folk nick Tod!” he snarled. “It took Weir the Saint to do it twice, but it would take his master himself for the third time.”

Major Weir, standing attentive, appeared untouched by the reproach.

“How have I fooled you?” he demanded. “If you mint at the matter of the bargain entered into between us on the Lammermuirs, I am ready, and at this instant, to deliver the girl Chrystal to you, in fulfilment of my pledge.”

“Keep her for Esme, when he shall have murdered me!” Sandy retorted. “Fool I may be, but no’ so big a fool as not to know *why* you trusted me for this time, and *why* you left the task of welcome to the bibbing simpleton, whose sword you whetted with a lying tale of the lass being carried off by me!”

Major Weir turned from him as in weariness, seating himself.

“If you have aught to accuse me of, I would remind you, as I have once before reminded you, that guess-work is not proof!”

“Then is this proof?” cried the other, thrusting the hands filled with Jean Gordon’s jewels beneath his eyes. “Proof and witness, for the great lady who gifted these to me, will be listened to, I’m thinking, when she swears to your fourfold villainy, as she swore it to me on the day that I came from her to this dwelling, to be robbed by you!” The hoarse voice sank into an oily chuckle. “It was an ill night’s work for me, thought I, when I came to myself down by the Nor’ Loch, with cleaned-out pouches and harns, but to-day I know it was a worse night’s work for ye!”

He paused, but his hearer, elbow on knee and a hand over his mouth, preserved his attitude of in-

difference. His self-control seemed to shatter the Hope's, as stones shatter on the living rock

"A worse night for ye, gossip!" Sandy screamed suddenly "For *in the light of the Hand of Glory*, I saw, though by your arts I was made to forget it till this day, how Weir may come to spell Warlock! Witchcraft, Major Weir, is what I have to accuse ye of, and the proof what I saw that night, and shame and flame the wage thereof!"

Elbow on knee, a hand over his mouth, Major Weir flinched no hair. His composure sapped Sandy's excitement, he shifted his feet, stealing askance glances at the figure, silent, brooding, as the Sphinx to whom the passions and strivings of men are but eddies of desert-dust

"Can ye say why this thing should not be, Major Weir?" he demanded at last, but falteringly

The man he spoke to rose up from his chair, the dusk magnifying him as it appeared, so tall did he loom

"It will not be, Sandy Hope!" he returned

Puzzled by confidence where he had looked for supplications, the red-haired man faced him sullenly

"Ay, man, and why not?"

"Because it has not been already!" The contemptuous tone edged Weir's voice still "If it was in your mind to bring the accusation you speak of, you would scarce have waited to warn me to my face. It needs no witchcraft to know we are not yet at the kernel of the matter!"

The Hope contended with a dry tongue and dry lips. They granted him no more than a whisper, but it crackled through the silence and the dusk

"*Has not been, is not will not be!*" it said "There must be a second bargain between us two, if ye would make all sure! Give me what the lass Chrystal brought into this house wi' her last coming hither!"

Major Weir, leaning over his black staff, spoke impassively

"Your kernel has a shell over haid for me to crack! What brought she?"

Again his composure chafed the smaller villain into plain speaking

"The Honours of Scotland!" he cried violently "The Honours, stolen by the lass and her leman from Dunnottar, and carried by her, as I know, to town, for the fine lover had them not when the slough-dogs ran me him down, and they had from the outset pressed him too hard to leave him an instant in which he could have rid himself of them!" Sandy ground his teeth, remembering how Adam Gordon had escaped on the night when Edinburgh reek had come within sight of him and his men making for Cromwell's camp with the prisoner, which was all he had taken to prove his boasts to the English true "But I've run them to earth here, by luck and the grace of my five wits, and now ye ken the price I'll take for the silence that, once broken, will break ye once and for aye!"

The hoarse angry tones had died into completest silence before Major Weir answered

"That's the price you'll take, but what price will you sell for again?" he demanded

"The unknottin' o' a pocket-napkin!"

"You will not bind my eyes with your napkin!" replied the other tranquilly "I move blindfold in no matter, and I can see further than you think!"

Leaning over the staff, he spoke on in his even voice

"I see a man who dares not denounce his enemies to the Parliament, or he will miss his chance of bringing the Regalia of Scotland to an English market"

As though a swivel had been trained upon him, the Hope leapt back

"You guess shrewdly, Major Weir," he stammered, almost against will "Ay," his further speech seemed the rebutting to the judge in himself of an unspoken charge, "but the price I sell for is not what you think To win revenge on the King who fooled and flouted and foiled me, is what the Honours will go for in the Southron market!"

He drew forth a kerchief creased by folding, fingering its knotted corners

"One, two, three!" quoth he, with the cunning look "For I'm thinking if I leave lass Chrystal to ye, gossip, I've have paid my grudge in full to her gay lover and her!"

The cunning look lingered on the fourth corner of the kerchief replacing in his bosom. The treachery of the man Grizel had named Judas came nowhere short, the happiness of Chrystal and her lover would be equally wrecked by a marriage with Esmé, as by the means Sandy had just indicated to Major Weir, while revenge on the King by betraying the Regalia to the English matched well with the betrayal of Weir himself to the mob, to which, if Esme carried the torch, Sandy had laid the train. As though the last reflection warned him to haste, he straightened himself, plucking the other by the sleeve.

"Ay, gossip, is it speech or silence?" he asked familiarly.

The dark man drew himself upright, the knuckles clenched on the staff glimmering bone-white.

"Since better may not be, Sandy Hope, I buy your silence—*thus*!"

The staff, swung in both hands, had crashed through red hair and skull, the bone crushed beneath it like an eggshell. Without a groan Tod Sandy sank together, dead in the instant of his triumph.

Major Weir brought the lamp near, and looked long. The face spattered with the Hope's blood and brains lit up hideously, alone with the dead man for sole company, a Thomas Weir that the house in the Bow knew, that the street of the Bow did not know, took overt possession of his kingdom, the tabernacle of flesh.

On his knees, gloating over his unresisting enemy, the secret man came to himself at the sound of voices and steps. The hour of the prayer-assembly was upon him, unnoted in the letting loose of himself, for a moment the will seemed powerless to chain back its captive once more. Yet—

"To-night's subject is the last end of the righteous!"
Major Weir murmured, rising stiffly to his feet

The rumble of the staircase rising out of the cellars and settling back into its usual position, appeared to rouse Grizel from her lethargy. She moved slowly across the room, kindling many lights and reordering the furniture displaced in the vigil that had ended at last. The voices and steps that had roused Major Weir to the present recalled Chrystal from the limbo of despair in which she had sunk since day had died from the world. A crowded prayer-assembly offered a chance to slip away unseen, even this fourth night of October might still not prove too late to carry tidings of 'the King's Start' to those waiters in the house on the Flodden-Wall.

The door opening from the outside sent her back a pace from where she stood close by it. For the tenth of an instant the man entering came as a stranger, the face livid-dark, flaccid with strong emotion, the eyes of humid hazel now light-tawny as those of a panther that has sprung. They, more than the relentless hand which gripped the flesh of her arm, made Chrystal recoil further as Major Weir addressed her in a fierce whisper.

"Your first movement to leave this house will be my signal to denounce you before all, as the agent of the Malignants who would fain win the King from the Parliament, as they have already won the Honours!"

The pain of the arm bruised in his grip, possibly kept a faint at bay. Already the hand had relaxed, Weir turning to greet the groups entering behind him, with a kindness rendered more attractive by his evident exhaustion and the haggard looks which befriended him well. The glamour that was part of the man, enhanced by the pathos of ill-health, gradually dispersed the mists of suspicion which, since the night of the mysterious palatine, had been an impalpable atmosphere of the prayer-assembly. Major Weir was once more the Saint of the West Bow when at last he took his place in the heart of the circle that thronged on him for his faintest word.

The faces about were sympathetic, admiring, enthusiastic, but the two which were all Major Weir saw were none of them,—a woman braced as in expectation against the wainscoting, and a girl cowered like a trapped thing in a corner, were the objects of his furtive glances

Major Weir closed his eyes against such wanderings, and the circle gathered close. The rich voice rose out of the midst of it

“We consider to-night the end of the righteous”

Fervent sighs and whispers had hushed themselves, but the leader of the exercises said no more. The tall figure swayed slightly, missing perhaps the support of the staff which there had been no moment to cleanse from clotted blood and hair before the gathering of the assembly. Silence, then a great cry

“FORSAKEN!”

The word, leaping in echoes from the walls, set each man looking in his neighbour's face. They pressed about the tall figure in the solicitude of disciples, only Grizel, one hand against the wall, bent forward as though listening to what others could not hear

The tumult of voices speaking of illness and remedies was overborne by one strange to them, so harsh and toneless did it break from the man in their midst. The dark form had straightened itself, for the last time Major Weir prayed

Like molten lava the prayer flowed, but it cried to no God. Women covered their ears, men made significant gesture and strove to interrupt the toneless voice, that cited the sins of a lifetime as reason why the Master whom the man had served should not forsake him now. The ghastly recital seemed the ravings of fever to the hearers, one alone, the minister of Ormiston, who, apparently as ever tinged with the jaundice of prejudice, from the beginning of the evening had held aloof from the enthusiasm of the assembly, and now, as usual, appeared of a different opinion

“Leeches and drugs may avail the body, but I

doubt me here have we to do with a sick-soul ! ” he intervened, pushing through the crowd from which he was used to so scornfully stand apart “ Major Weir, my good friend,” the eagerness with which a man sees an opportunity long sought for vibrated in his tone, “ slough by confession the wounds festering in you, so that we may join in supplication that ye may be healed Confess, confess ! here are none but friends round you ! ”

The authoritative urging, tempered by kindness, took effect on the mind fevered to frenzy Yet at first Major Weir would have shaken off the hand strong on his arm, had not the minister of Ormiston held fast

“ Confess ! confess ! ” he cried on and on in reiteration

Suddenly the man he adjoined turned abruptly Under his dark stare the glib persecutor at his side wavered, shrank back among the rest Major Weir laughed out into the shuddering faces

“ I will confess to this godly assembly, but I fear me it will not tend to the use of edifying ! ” the toneless voice exclaimed

The fearful revelation unfolded, a page from the chronicles of lost souls The man who had won the by-name of Angelical Thomas seemed to glory in his tale of a life unguessed-at, once alone the harsh voice faltering when it spoke of a woman Alice, struck for death, not by the hand of him she had loved, but by slow-creeping knowledge of him The dream that had visited Chrystal in her first down-lying in the house that was the lair of hidden evil, appeared to be blazoned abroad by the voice that pealed on, calling the roll-call of secret sins

Grizel, by the wainscoting, began to move Stealthily she approached the doorway by which Chrystal, too dazed for thought, still crouched, instinctive hands over her ears Stealthily, cautiously, Grizel lessened the distance between them, the faces fixed in fascination over the awful Confession, did

not see when at last she stooped forward and touched the girl on the arm

Obedient as a sleep-walker, Chrystal rose, following the woman over the threshold. Unnoted by all the two descended the stairs, the night air crisped with early frost coming cold on them through the house-door left ajar.

Grizel foremost, stopped. The lights of the room above overflowed into the hall, striking, as the two looked, on a moving line rolling its length down the hall and out into the night. Rats, many rats, possibly disturbed by the recent uncovering of the cellars beneath the staircase, were in a serried company hurrying in exodus through the open door.

"The rats go! The rats go!"

Grizel's wailing cry had the ring of one confronted with the end. Where she stood she collapsed, growing of a sudden into an old feeble woman, as a tree undermined by decay at its heart sinks before a rising wind into mouldering ruin. Incoherently murmuring, she rocked with hidden face, whimpering at Chrystal's efforts to console or inspire, but clinging to her with wild beseeching hands.

To the forlorn pair, a sound other than the scuffling of the rats on their passage, or the voice indistinct, monotonous, overhead, stole out of distance. A murmur like the moaning of brewing storm thrilled the night.

The rats were gone by, some belated stragglers alone bringing up the rear. Grizel lifted the face hidden like a frightened child's in Chrystal's skirts, towards the girl tense in her listening to the sounds surging always nearer.

"Do not leave Grizel, poor Grizel!" she babbled pitifully.

"Do you take me for a ratton, to desert a falling house?"

Chrystal could never recall how she dragged the helpless creature to her feet, urging her to the courtyard. The murmur had swelled into a roar, it scared the fugitives back from the black passage-way.

“Quick—the other outlet!”

Back to the doomed house, to be met, as well as followed, by the voice of the storm. Through the room by which Major Weir was wont to come and go it came strangely nearer. Chrystal fled back upon her steps, the hour of need waking instinct to seek the presence of her fellows. A mob, this one nearer, wilder, swept up from the Cowgate.

“Give us out the trepanner of lasses! the dissembler! the hypocrite! Let us send the warlock Weir to his own place!”

A reaction was upon the people who had vibrated to the wild Confession, the strength of their belief in Major Weir making them ready to disbelieve him now. Murmurs relative to the known humility of Angelical Thomas, distorted by a mind overwrought with holy zeal, references to the chastening of the saints, found favour with the various shades of mind—the indolence unwilling to be wrenched from the safe tracks of discipleship into the rougher road of independent thought, the reluctance to own oneself victim of deception, or that rarest loyalty to whom the birth of suspicion, foe to its object, rends with travail-anguish. The aspect of the man himself, now sunk into brooding, was a strong ally to him, the women were quick to perceive it furnished at once defence and cause of the outpourings which the congregation had fused in pronouncing delirium. One man alone, the minister of Oimiston, stood once more apart, and scribbled in his tablets.

“Give us out the warlock!”

The storm had burst. Through the Stinking Close swept a seething mob, brought together, half scarcely knew how. They surged into the courtyard, the house, they filled the staircase, brought to a momentary lull by the check on the top-stair of the man who had led them on. Before him on the threshold of the brightly lighted room, gained by her a moment before, stood the girl he had come to rescue, the fear in her face waning at the unlooked-for sight of her kinsman Esmé. Behind her, the

prayer-assembly rallied about the figure of their leader, who, chin on breast, appeared unconscious of the turmoil

"Good folk, I pray you disperse in peace! Major Weir is stricken with sickness, but here is a godly assembly, surety against whatever charge ye lay to his account!"

A well-known elder spoke, stepping beside Chrystal, and a murmur of agreement swelled at his back. Only the minister of Ormiston stood out from the others, the hand with the tablets in it raised in a protest

"We should scarce be in our duty, did we make no inquiry into the Confession which I hold here, noted down from Major Weir's own lips!"

Chrystal turned on him with a flash of scorn

"The crime you hold his worst will not be written down there, sir, that of aye outshining yourself!" she exclaimed

The mob met so unexpectedly, and lacking whipping-on, was wavering, those foremost acting bulwarks to the zeal of the rear, ignorant of the turn events had taken. The lust of hounding down a hard-pressed enemy was foreign to Esmé's nature, he had used the instrument put by Sandy into his hand for the rescue of the girl he loved, and was content with its accomplishment. At his sign the followers dispersed through the mob were by weight and example breaking a path towards the courtyard. Already the ebb-tide on the crowd had set in, when a whisper, with the intensity of a cry, thrilled those who heard—

"Take the black staff we' ye, friends, and ye'se take a' the evil in the house!"

Grizel Weir stood at the stairfoot, beckoning those nearest, as she led with an odd dancing gait down the passage-way opposite the house-door. Looking back and beckoning, she came to the room where a dead man lay in wait to tell a damning tale

A torch produced from somewhere cleft the darkness, under its oriflamme some two or three pressed over the threshold. For a half minute they saw

nothing, then from the sea of darkness a corpse floated up into sight, the black staff thrown beside it like a spar that had held no saving

A roar searched the house to its foundations As if feet—of which the drift of boots and shoes alone remained to witness that they had ever trod the earth—were returned to judgment, a trampling came upon the stairs, the oncoming rush driving back those meeting it Shouting like one man, the pack of clamorous accusers burst into the living-room, but the silence of the dead seemed louder than their shouting, and the witness who could not be gainsaid was the red-haired man carried in their midst, his dead hand clenched upon the corner of the handkerchief which was knotted for revenge on Major Weir

The sight appeared to smite asunder the disciples drawn like a bodyguard about the dark man in their midst One by one they fell back from him, looking strangely on his familiar face and the minister of Ormiston maintaining position at his side

"This is work for the Tolbooth!" the pause was broken by his voice

With the swaying forward of the crowd, interruption came Parting those about her as much by her unseeing look as by her stretched-out hands, Grizel stood, the mark that accompanied her trances distinct on her forehead She pointed at the dark man, seated, silent

"Your shroud to your neck, brother, and the flame consumes all The house where you lived and sinned shall be forgotten, in years to come none in the West Bow shall know so much as the name of Major Weir!"

She pointed to the minister of Ormiston

"Satan casting out Satan! All crimson is not the same colour, and though your sins are not his, they may be none the less red! Satan may do God's will, but scarce in His way!"

The minister changed colour The staff, passed from hand to hand, had come to him in turn, he made an angry gesture with it for her silence, gazing her

shoulder The touch shattered the trance, the wild dignity clothing the priestess of second-sight fell from the woman cringing as though the blow had been many times harder

"The staff touches!" she shrieked "'Tis the sign! In the coeven of Dalkeith 'twas told me,—the day it touches it will take me—home with itself!"

"She confesses! Secure the witch!" him of Ormiston exclaimed

"No, no, no!"

Stung by terror, Grizel sprang forward over the chalk-line which for years the mind broken by a brother's cruelty had caused her to keep renewed in daily silent protest, setting her territory, as it were, apart from the man whose life must of necessity be shared by her Trespassing over her own boundary, she threw herself on the board beside the hearth-stone, tearing it from its place with unaided fingers

"Gold! Yellow gold! I ken brother Thomas' hidie-holes, I will show them all if ye will leave me!" she panted as she strove

A candle snatched from a wall-sconce illumined the hole laid bare The rays fell full on the packet nested within, an instant flash and a report startling back the curious crowd, as the rag enfolding the contents burst into flame, probably under the influence of light on the chemical which had soaked it, safeguard of Major Weir's contrivance against possible thieves

"We have heard! we have seen! What needs more? The witches to the Tolbooth!"

Esmé's efforts at escape had been baulked continually by the mere pressure of the crowd, he, with the girl he held clasped, had been despite effort swept near the core of the scene, the dark man seated in his chair Chrystal broke from the detaining hold

"Not Grizel!" she cried in the face of the rush "See you not she is but a daft woman?"

Her courage of resistance won an instant's pause, on which the minister's voice blared out—

"Take the whelp with the bitch!"

At the bidding, with which a pang of shame under a girl's outspoken indignation was repaid, an indescribable tumult leapt up. Snatching Chrystal to him, Esmé fought desperately doorwards but the mob-blood was up, he was hemmed in, battered, his power of resistance beaten down. Yet there was a moment when Grizel's furious struggles drew attention from them, and Chrystal spoke low in his ear.

"If ye would save me, make the best of your ways to a house the seventh in the third wynd to the left of the Tron Kirk. Ask there for Gordon o' Brackley, and tell him of my need!" she breathed, scarcely finishing before she was torn roughly forward, the man she clung to as roughly hurled back.

Through the uproar the immutable seated figure had appeared unconscious of the whole, but with the crowd closing in on him, Major Weir rose up to his height. Daunted once more by his aspect, those who would have laid hands on him fell back, they were content to form a ring, in the midst of which the secret man moved staidly as ever to the door through which the women had been already hurried.

On the threshold of the lighted room, Major Weir turned and looked back. His dark gaze swept it all, the circle of captors about him, the familiar chamber beyond, the stein, awed gravity on the faces of disciples involuntarily drawn together, as though watching at a deathbed. Major Weir laughed his low laugh, walking forward to the staircase.

"There's a wind blowing up from the Forth!" said he.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE WIDOWED LOVER

A LUTE, twangled "unhandily" by a lad with a broad riband of black tied scarf-fashion over his shoulder, thrummed wearisomely through the October air. The musician, seated on a bench before a change-house, appeared less occupied with his music than with his surroundings, a cloud of dust approaching on the highroad enticed his curious glances.

The lad tucked the lute under his armpit and rose up as a horseman dawned out of the dust-cloud. The upturned collar of a riding-cloak concealed the face of the rider drawing bridle, but the voice raised in a call for the host spoke the gentleman.

The horse, by wet flanks and sobbing breath, had come fast and far, but his master stood like a man for whom the milestones of his journey are still in front. The question with which he saluted tardy Boniface was not of cellar or cookery, he disregarded the tankard filled out when his horsehoofs had first sounded.

"Good fellow, can you tell me aught of a lady, young and fair-haired, riding this way in these last days?"

The lutenist, obviously listening, nodded his head twice or thrice. The host shook his head. The rider snatched the tankard from his hand, and emptied it at a draught.

"I would leave this nag of mine here, if you have aught in the stables to carry me," he said, with the same air of restrained haste.

The innkeeper's explanation on the times and the scarcity of horse-flesh promised to be lengthy. In the

first sentences the lute-player sidled on the stranger, to speak in a falsetto voice

"Sir," said he, "if ye be him I wait for, show me for whom ye ride?"

The other surveyed the fantastic figure with sufficient astonishment

"For her I love!" he responded curtly enough. The lad craned, to whisper in his ear—

"If ye would see the fair Gordon, follow me!"

Leaving no moment for questioning, he made off, looking back with various encouraging signs to the man whose hesitations were speedily ended. He caught up with the mysterious envoy at the entrance of the inn-stables, whence two horses were already being brought forth.

"My mistress, as you see, has prepared against your coming," observed the lute-player importantly. "Truly are you later than she reckoned for,—a night and a day have I kicked my heels in this pestilent change-house,—but these beasts are fleet as Venus' doves, we shall make a speedy end of vigil if it please you to mount and ride!"

He had clambered into his saddle and taken the lead before the man, evidently perplexed over such sudden annexing, had thrown a crown piece and a recommendation of his own horse to the landlord, and overtaken his unexpected guide. The horses were fresh, some moments went by in establishing understanding between them and their riders, before the gentleman found leisure to address his companion.

"I have not the pleasure of your name, young sir!"

A sigh, lustily dolorous, was heaved by the lad.

"By virtue of my father I am named Jock Hope," said he, "and my kinsmen call me Dandy Jock, but the cognomen which I should wish carven on my tombstone when mine hour strikes, is that o' the Widowed Lover!"

At his first words the eyes scarcely visible above the masking collar, had come to him with a flash of amusement, deepening at the pathetic finish.

"And why that?"

The Widowed Lover arranged the riband across his breast

"I bear this token of mourning for the bride rent from me in the marriage-moment, till I shall dye it in the heart's-blood of the man who bore away the bell from me!" he remarked "I know not if you are sensible of the word-play, sir,—my wit will sparkle in spite o' sorrow,—and truly cruel Chrystal is, to borrow the French, a *belle* worth bearing away!"

"And how accords your present errand with this vow of yours?" demanded his companion

"'Tis the stepping-stone to it, sir, she I serve pledging herself to help me to my true love when I shall have once helped her to hers Nor," Dandy Jock brought hand to hilt with an air, "must you conceive the bribe needed to make me fulfil *devoir*, it being aye the part o' manhood to help beauty at a pinch!"

"What shape will these consolations of your mistress take towards you?" asked the gentleman abruptly

"The ridding me of Gordon of Brackley, sir, who, close as he stands to the fair Gordon, is knit to her with no goodwill," prated Jock "Sweet Chrystal, widow of an attainted traitor, will make few bones of wedding him whom she aye, secret though she kept it, preferred!"

The horse beside him checked and curveted as though the hand on his bridle had contracted sharply It was dusk, no more than the figures of the riders were visible to each other

"How came you to know of my coming?"

"My mistress, sir, on departing from Stirling, left me at the change-house where we met, as being one ye would be bound to pass I, as her faithful squire, am alone in the secret, the rest holding she will but to St Andrews for her health"

"And when and where is the denouncement of Brackley to have place?"

"At your first coming, so hath my mistress pro-

mised," Dandy avowed, vaguely conscious of the scorn even in the controlled voice "Despatches sent back by me to the Council, shall, among other matters, contain full proof of mine enemy's intrigues against the League and Covenant "

The gentleman fell into silence, putting his beast along at a pace that told of fierce impatience to come to his goal Dandy Jock strained looks, foiled by the dusk, towards him, he hemmed once or twice, but the rider was oblivious of his uneasiness

At last, on the outskirts of a wood, Jock pressed his horse close to his charge

"As I trust, I have conducted you to your satisfaction, sir," quoth he, "for we are upon the place I was bidden bring you Of your goodness let us bind our beasts to trees, the path being overly narrow for aught but our own shoon "

The horses, fetlock-deep in wet moss, whinnied a little after the masters plunging on foot into a wood-track The strenuous pace of the man he guided forced Jock into a trot, he was fain now and again to catch at the stranger's arm, directing him by act instead of word, into the right one of the paths threading among trees An unformed apprehension, as much as the hurried walk, choked him past speech, when the path they followed conducted them to their goal, a hunting-lodge with lights peeping, like imprisoned lasses, through chinks of the shuttered windows The stranger was for striding on the door, but his breathless guide pulled him aside, delivering three soft knocks on one of the jealous panes A woman's skirts rustled, then a woman's voice spoke

"Who comes ? "

"Dandy, madam, and another ' " the falsetto tones uttered among their pantings

At the first motion of the door in its opening, the man with the cloak still about his face put his shoulder to it and pushed it wide The woman behind it giggled at the amorous onset, the petticoats rustled in coy retreat on a room where candles twinkled and the supper-table was laid for two The boots

of the arrival sounded close behind the silken skirts, the latter made a great cheese as their wearer whirled about, to cast herself on the breast of the man whom Dandy Jock had brought to her

"At last, my King!" she cried ardently

The man and woman started apart. But while the woman's grey face gave the lie to the roses on her cheeks, that from which the masking cloak had fallen back was brilliant with sudden comprehension

"Your servant, Lady Jean!" said Adam Gordon, and bowed with a grace

"You!" Jean Gordon cried but the single word

"Whom looked you for?" demanded the man quietly

"Make what ye can of it!" the woman in the gala-dress that was no niggard of the plump charms of neck and bosom, responded with reviving insolence "Lighted rooms and a supper-table are no evidence to confiscate my widow's thirds, even your strait-laced venom can find nought to carp at in my breaking a journey in the hunting-lodge belonging to my uncle Argyle, my women also with me! Hate me as I hate you, but I have the whipland of you, for your hate is but a barren stock!"

"Yet you served me, madam!" returned Gordon with clear-cut emphasis "Your tick, doubtless planned to discredit me with my party, has left me your debtor, preserving me to strike a shrewd blow at the right time for the Cause widowed of many better men" He smiled at the chagrin with which his adversary bit her red lip "Allons, Madam Delilah, perhaps the proofs of my treachery to the League and Covenant, writ in those despatches to be borne of Dandy Jock, will serve your Campbell heart better!"

A fury flared into the pale blue eyes that had sunk from their insolence. Jean swept past the man who had thrown out a tub to gain himself a few moments for thought, unable to guess whether the wife, to seek whom he had ridden it from Edinburgh that day, was, as he had been at the first ready

to fancy, in the hunting-lodge to which a chance had led him

"Ye fool, clown, and traitor, out from me!"

The words, punctuated with resounding ear-boxes, coincided with Jean's first step over the threshold. Her unlucky messenger, fallen upon in his eaves-dropping, defended himself

"Your word was to look for a cloaked horseman riding a grey at speed!" he vociferated in falsetto. "Hearing him also a-seeking a woman fair-haired, who would not deem him the lover—of your ladyship's hopes?" Dandy Jock added spitefully

"Could your ass's ears not have known his voice?"

"Ay, truly!" Dandy spoke with offended dignity. "I marked it as a stranger's, my mistake being thereby encouraged, I reading in the romaunts that true knights do alway take to themselves some make of disguise when they ride on their adventure, Sir Tristram cheating all men by calling himself Sir Tramtrist, a device something of the simplest as methinks! So a man might well change his voice!"—

"Ye prating natural I'll change your tune for ye!" Lady Jean rushed again on the assault. Jock doubled, dodging about the supper-table

"There are more fools than one!" he squeaked. "What name has your ladyship for yourself, waiting here on a King who, may I never wear lace more! is liker to put a fool's-cap than a crown on a head with no more wit in it than to take a jest for earnest!"

With a shriek of rage his pursuer threw herself half over the table, to reach the sender of such Parthian darts. Cloth, dishes, decanters, were dragged off by her onslaught. The silver candlesticks shared the general wreck. The candles wavered and went out, leaving the room sallow in the dawn visible through the unshuttered windows at the back. The ghostly light glimmered on Adam Gordon's smile as he spoke to the angry woman

"Lighted rooms and a supper-table are evidence enough for the Kantore when 'tis a King gives the rendezvous!" he said slowly

The contempt of eyes and voice lashed the widow into one of her worst outbreaks

"What, Brackley, must ye grudge me the leavings o' what Brackley's wife has had to heart's content?" she screamed "Bonny Chrystal! sweet King's Butter! who not a week ago was hanging about Argyle's Lodging in Stirling, to renew an acquaintance made at the Balmerino House in Leith! The Butter will no doubt be cheaper now, it is a week since the Crown had the monopoly o't!"

"A week ago! She was in Stirling then!"

A sigh of relief broke from the man, coming at last upon a clue for his search. Jean Gordon's face, regarding the lightening of his own, worked with spite.

"Go ask the King if ye doubt me!" she cried viciously "The King, who forswore himself to the minister who found your wife in his company, that Sweet Innocence, Chrystal clear, the Butter made for more than one customer, might leave him with a reverend stamp upon it!"

"She left Stirling then? For where?"

Lady Jean shrugged insolent shoulders

"How know I where a King gave the rendezvous?"

Gordon wrapped his cloak about him

"You have a good taste in horse-flesh, madam," he remarked "The two tethered without will by now have got their second wind, we shall make Stirling before the dinner-hour. One of those women mentioned by your ladyship will do well to bring you garments something warmer, the morning air being chill!"

"You think to bring me back to Stirling?" cried the woman

"Say, rather, I intend it, madam!"

Jean burst into her boisterous laughter

"Come then!" she exclaimed, waving him towards the door "There's no one will have so warm a welcome from the Parliament as the man who can bring them the Honours lifted from Dunnottar!"

No hint of discomfiture appeared in the Cavalier's look

"Who may that man be, your ladyship?"

The steady eyes and careless question worked disconcerted pause, preceding stammering reply

"Who but yourself?"

Gordon laid his hand upon the door-latch

"Shall Jock fetch yon woman?" he inquired

"Why man, will you deny you were at Dunnottar?"

"Is Dunnottar a thieves' seminary?" Adam retorted satirically Lady Jean stamped her foot

"What of the key with the handle wrought into the letters B and O? The key munn Chrystal stole for you from Major Weir?"

She stopped with a gasp His eyes on hers, Gordon held out his open palm, the key taken from Montrose in his prison lying across it

"It locks the Honours no longer!" he observed

Gazing at the key and his quiet face, his adversary with knitted brows seemed to search for the Check-mate implied by his words

"Put it, madam, that a timely lifting of the Honours had kept them from falling to a company of Southrons, under the guidance of a traitorous Scot, one Sandy Hope"—

The man speaking with negligent ease, broke off in his turn at Jean's change of countenance

"Sandy Hope!" he repeated "Do you know the name, madam?"

"I! No!" The woman denied with shivering lips

"Sweet my lady, loth were I to give beauty the lie, but myself spied him on a day coming forth from your Lodging in Leith Kirk-Gate!" Dandy Jock pounced on her trip with malicious memory Jean carried her hands to the throat where something choked

"I — had forgot!" she amended "It was—was anent his wedding on his kinswoman"

"The wedding of Chrystal!" the falsetto shrilled indignantly "Your ladyship was for giving Sandy the bride then, for whom I have been Jacob to your Laban?"

Gordon's strong hand recalled Jock in his angry excitement

"My tale to the Parliament grows clear on a point dark to me till now," he amended "Will your ladyship permit me to give a guess at the name of the one who betrayed the secret of Dunnottar to Sandy Hope?"

The plump shoulders above the gay dress drew together shiveringly, the pale blue eyes returning the merciless gaze upon them

"Since the Lady Jean Gordon ensures me a welcome from the Parliament, that woman had best be summoned," the man added smilingly "I will beguile the time of a lady's toilet, madam,—you will wish to look your best for the company who will hear my tale,—by," he turned suddenly on Dandy, "learning from my Widowed Lover here, how came your ladyship and his Valourhood to terms over the wedding of my wife?"

Dandy Jock, fascinated eyes on the hilt significantly hitched forward by Gordon, stood portentously grave Gordon smiled again

"Your knightliness of the Black Riband will have guessed that here's Blackley, ready to give you your chance of dying in blood—whether that badge of yours or yourself, five minutes will show!" he remarked Dandy bumped down upon his knees

"I yield, sir!" he cried, "taking no shame thereby, the younger knights ever ceding in the romaunts to the eldern! She," he pointed viciously to his sullen patroness, "did alway ill-wish sweet Chrystal, sinning towards her from hate, but I from love, which makes me blithe to serve her husband," the falsetto was rising with the lengthening of the steel showing below the hilt, "telling him what my Lady Jean would not, that she rode for Edinburgh the morning she left Stirling!"

The sword clicked home

"For Edinburgh! You are sure of so much?"

"Myself can bring you to the household with

whom she lay, before she journeyed Embro'-wards in the company of reverend ministers ' "

The man he spoke to seemed to forgot the mincing lad, the woman with the eyes of the cat-creature trapped, not tamed He strode through the 100m's length

"How long agoe ' "

The light had strengthened, and Gordon's eyes looked absently through the window by which he stood The unshuttered casement framed a sea of treetops, green and souging, a road below the steep falling away of the ground showed white as a line of beach

Dandy Jock was alive to the pleasures of confession

"'Tis a week agoe, as my lady saith, that sweet Chrystal chanced on me in Stirling," he began importantly "I would pray you to mark if I sinned, it was from love, offering nothing less than honourable marriage before witnesses in my Lady Jean's presence and bedchamber, and never opening lips more over my suit after the lass' avowal of her marriage with you' She there," he repeated his former gesture, "it was who was all for delating Chrystal as a None-too-good to the Presbytery" —

"You were for delating my wife to the Presbytery? "

Gordon asked it low, but the glance challenging Jean was not good to meet

"Ay, and ye owe it to a King's lie that the Dame o' Brackley has not been put upon her trial," snarled the woman with the venom of the cat's claws

The eyes turning contemptuously from her did not lose their fire Down the white road a company was riding in a singular haste, the keen eyes watching could read the boar's head blazoned here and there

"Our ride to Stirling will not lack escort, madam," Gordon, still looking from the window, said carelessly "I see my Lord Argyle's crest among the huntsmen who, with their hunt up so early, will doubtless turn aside to my lord's hunting-lodge"

The cat at bay was in the bound with which Jean Gordon reached his side

"My uncle!" she murmured "I am lost!"

"Say, rather, found, your ladyship! My lord, as it seems, forestalls my purpose of teaching Lady Jean what it is to stand before the Presbytery, where she would fain have dragged the innocent"

With a hard gasp the woman faced the situation, her look strained after the squad, vanishing where the road curved from sight

"You hold a hand of trumps, sir, and the Italian knave by which I could have spoiled your play is slipped through my fingers!" she said between her teeth "Winners can afford to be generous, Brackley, and you will scarce grudge to see the name I bear saved from open shame!"

With an enigmatical smile she swept from the room, beckoning craven Dandy to her side. Notwithstanding the nonchalance displayed in his late encounter with Lady Jean, Gordon's heart beat at the double against the key that locked the Honours no longer, with the floor already quivering under the thundering nearer of the riders, he was far from being sure that such a tale as he had avowed himself ready to tell would receive a favourable hearing, that the agent of the bold stroke of the Royalists would find pardon in the circumstance of having outstripped the English in the lifting of the Honours of Scotland

Yet, when knocks fell like hail on the outer door, the Cavalier, best weaponed, he knew, by coolness, moved to open it with all his negligent bearing. The panels creaked and strained under the impatience of those without, but the words, breathed in the instant of his confronting the knockers, were unexpected

"What, Brackley, Brackley here! Scotland's saved from ruin then, and God be thanked!"

The gladd-eyed Marquess of Argyle pressed past him into the house. The morning light was little favourable to him, his lips twitched like a man suddenly aged

"My friend, it is of the utmost importance that I should have speech of his Majesty!"

"His Majesty?" The Cavalier almost shouted.

"What but attendance on him should bring a known Royalist like yourself into these parts?" Argyle answered quickly "In a frolic—for 'tis the impossible that aught but women and wine should lie at the bottom of a like freak—his Majesty has made a runaway flitting o't, we have, at the leading o' Divine Providence, tracked him here"

"A bag-Providence, turned out to run where we would it should go, sir, is apt to lead on a false trail ' I vow the King is not within "

Over the curt answer Argyle flamed into his weak anger

"I tell you, sir, he is within ' " he asserted, entering the room of the supper-table "What else means your presence here? What means the horses tethered without? What, God help me! means the flight of my unhappy niece?"

The perception of a wave of excitement drew him to the hall again, to scale the stairs leading to a gallery, where a group of those who had ridden with him clustered about a doorway, speaking under breath of locks and tell-tale voices

"Burst me the door!" the Marquess ordered

Two or three gentlemen setting their shoulders to the hinges, sprawled headlong before the door flung back Jean Gordon in the entrance met the bewildered faces with defiance

"Welcome, gentles, to my bridal!" she cried

"Jean, Jean! is this conduct for the Lady Jean Gordon?"

Argyle's stammering reproach did not touch the woman's hard composure

"The Lady Jean Gordon has taken the bit between her teeth this time!" she responded with her jangling laugh "Yet since ye've broken up so early to come to the wedding o' me, no doubt my husband's kinsman," she pointed a mocking finger into the hall below, "will waive a duty in your favour, my good uncle, if ye are minded to give the bride away!"

"Niece, to whom?" demanded Argyle feverishly

Lady Jean stepped aside with a swing of silken skirts. Behind their circumference Jock Hope was revealed, with nothing less than the assurance of a successful bridegroom in his air.

"Yon' Niece, this is not the moment for a Yuletide daffing! Where is the King?"

A pulse beating in the woman's neck was the only sign that the question touched her, as she faced them all.

"What have I to do with his Majesty?"

"I said so from the first!" Lord Loin had barely waited her rejoinder to whisper in his father's ear. "The stag royal has headed for the hills!"

"Buckingham hinted as much, but this seemed the likelier!"

Argyle held his chin, as his son signed to a gentleman with strongly-marked eyebrows.

"No need to lose a second more!" Loin said in his low tone. "Trust me, the goose-gul who told of a gallant, hawk on wrist, snatching a kiss with an inquiry as to the road for Clova, told truth! Commission Montgomery here, and I'll wad that he and his troop will come up with the fugitive for all his start of us!"

"'Tis a delicate task!" Argyle gave dubious agreement. "Colonel Montgomery," he drew the approaching officer a step apart, "you have readiness and discretion, and 'fore God, sir, you will need them, if the crack in Scotland to-day is not to widen past repair! His Majesty's return is imperative, however it be procured, even at the price of his speedy coronation in Scone. Promise him power, pleasures, pledge yourself to pardon and reconciliation for the Royalists, paint to him that Scotland's division will be Cromwell's opportunity,—but bring him back to Perth!"

"The hare once caught, will be served up to your lordship easily enough!" responded the officer with a self-possession that seemed to instil a certain confidence to the Campbells watching his business-like departure. With the sound of horses galloping on their first stage for the Highlands, Argyle passed

will doubtless company us back to Stirling, that folk may see for themselves that the ballant of the Lady and the Page ends, ballant-fashion, with nothing under marriage ! ”

The woman who had fought her corner could afford to ignore the suspicion that edged his tone. Led by Argyle, the company moved hallward, Jock scurrying at his bride's bidding to summon the women, probably awake by now. The gladd-eyed Marquess paused beside Brackley, leaning in the supper-room's entrance.

“ You will ride with us, sir ? ” he said courteously. From now out it would be Campbell policy to conciliate Royalists. “ I am beholden to your countenance of our impetuous widow, none will dare hint ill of an elopement to which a first husband's kinsman lent presence ! ”

Gordon looked steadily beyond him. His eyes hardened as they met those of the woman his enemy, whose spite had insulted Montrose in his dying, whose jealousy had by so little failed to run down innocent Chrystal, whose effrontery alone had saved herself from being proclaimed before her world as the impudent sinner she was. He opened lips to speak the word that should bring richly deserved punishment on the creature standing naked, she and he knew, at his mercy.

“ My lord, my object in coming here was to find out the present whereabouts of my wife,” he said at last briefly. “ Under your lordship's leave, I will go my ways, leaving the Lady Jean in sufficient protection ”

An indescribable surprise flashed into the pale blue eyes, seeing Gordon thus cast away the weapon to his hand. In the bustle of departure they glanced back, from the groups about the doorway Jean took a doubtful step towards the man still in his moody attitude, half-provoked with himself that a woman's nakedness should be to him her strongest armour.

“ Dandy told truth ! ” she said with a curious accent. “ She rode towards Edinburgh ! ”

With the groping impulse to repay generosity,

she had gone before he could gather himself up for action. The cavalcade was already in motion under the pale autumn sunlight,—negative as sunlight cast within a murmur,—the hoises were making short work of the woodpaths. A vignette of Jock Hope looking singularly ill-at-ease in the post of honour at his lady's left, was flashed to Gordon, as he bestirred himself to mount the horse brought up by a zealous groom to the horse-block.

But the beast, quivering with pace under his sleek skin, must have his road appointed, and his rider knew it as little as he. The door opening on the Leith side of the house on the Flodden-Wall had offered an easy means of escape to the prisoner captured by the slough-dogs, from Sandy and the soldiers whom discipline could not hinder from straggling towards the close of their wild-goose expedition to Dunnottar, the haar thickening in the autumn evening had been scarcely needed to conceal the man falling out of ranks and vanishing with no more ado than the whisper of a word and the pulling of a latch. But with entrance to Lochiel, his anxiety over Chrystal's failure to put in an appearance from Stirling could not fail to infect her husband, it drove him—with no better protection than a cloak-collar against the danger of further encounters with the English and their traitorous tool—out again on that ride to Stirling in which he had been met by Dandy Jock, awaiting a traveller likely enough, the Widowed Lover's sapience considered, to take a roundabout. The news that the hunting-lodge had held for him, topped with that of the King's flight, with its hint of the Highlands, had swept away the hopes by which Gordon had dyked misgivings, he stood for long moments, looking now towards Stirling, where it seemed so certain that Chrystal had whispered her message in the ear for which it was meant, now towards Edinburgh, for which witnesses attested she had set out, but where the men who burned for her arrival kept vain vigil.

Gordon swung himself into the saddle at last, and

turned towards the town set like a jewel on the fretted silver of Forth links. He rode fast, as if to outride a fear, but Fear rode him like a night-hag. To start from Chrystal's starting-point, to track her, mile by mile, till the spot was reached where she must have turned aside, was the sole plan that occurred to him.

He was no more than a southron mile from Stirling when he took note of a horseman spurring against him. Wind and rain in the night had swept the roads, withered leaves dropped plump through the still air like birds winged by the first arrows of the Archer Winter, but the horse's hoofs beat out a train of sparks and dust under their oncoming. Adam, instinctively pulling his steed out of the way of a foul, heard with surprise his own name ringing in a hoarse hail.

The rider was close upon him now. Grim, haggard, unshorn, he showed in the morning light, but Gordon started in his saddle, recognising the man who had fought for him in the Grassmarket and against him in Cawdron Woods.

"Esmé Hope, still chasing the hangman round Scotland!" he exclaimed, reining back in deepening astonishment as the other threw his horse on his haunches beside him—to curse him in his teeth.

"Sir, I lack leisure for private quarrels."

The Cavalier's heel admonished his mount, but Esmé snatched at the rein. The gay blue eyes were bloodshot, his tongue stammered over any words but curses.

"Fool, who could not safeguard what ye gained, d'ye think I've near-hand burst a horse seeking you for a private quarrel?" he roared. "That I'd strike hands wi' ye if there was another man in Scotland would do what you can!"

"I?"

"Yourself, as the husband, curse ye, of Chrystal Hope!"

"Where is she?"

"In the Tolbooth, on suspicion of witchcraft!"

Pale as dying men, the two faced each other. Esmé shook his rein.

"Come!" shouted he "You, as her husband, will be heeded if ye plead for her—they will be tried to-day!"

"Who, in God's name?"

"Weir and his household!" With the horses breaking into their gallop, Esmé spoke connectedly "The happenings of it all seem to me like a hell's carnival, how bred in the first of it I know not, but Tod Sandy has met a death in the Bow by foul play, and the town talks of cellars filled with dead folk's bones and plunder and gold that bursts into flame when brought to light, and murder, lust, and wizardry are the whitest sins laid to the charge of Major Weir!"

"And Chrystal?"

"Was dragged from my arms to prison, as being involved with the witches Weir and his sister!"

"My God!"

Gordon cried it loudly, as one who invokes a champion The horses were doing all they knew, with Stirling gates in sight

"To my Lord Argyle!" he said briefly after a pause "He is, as I know, yonder"

"Ay, I encountered him and his company with Dandy cocked up beside a grand dame, and asked of the lad were you in the town?" Esmé returned "The lady 'twas who saved me an hour by crying to me the road I should take to fall in with you"

"How knew you to look for me in Stirling?"

In a dozen words Esme told him, as they clattered up the steep streets With his mention of the house on the Flodden-Wall Adam made a hasty gesture

CHAPTER XXV

BROTHER AND SISTER

"No word of the house whence you came from in the house where we go!" he said imperatively "That you got your foot over the threshold of it is luck which you can best give thanks for in silence!"

"The house is more hospitable than you give it credit for, for it opened at my first cheep," returned Esmé drily

"Whom saw you?"

"Never a one!"

"Who told you where to seek for me?"

"My two ears!"

"*Dame*, man, where were your eyes then?"

"Behind the bandage!"

"They blindfolded you?"

"Ay, with that first foot over the threshold"

Esmé launched a glance of comprehension at his companion "The tidings of Chrystal's mischance seemed to ill-please the Highland chief within, stiff as he had been anent your whereabouts, I had no sooner named the capture than he was all for speeding me forth, saying you had scarce twelve hours the start o' me, and bidding you, by me, make the best of your way to Embro', having, as her husband, the best chance of intervening in her favour," Esme laughed harshly "He gave me scant time to digest the news of the marriage, but, burn me! if I think Master Bare-shank's anxiety was for aught but his own share in the matter!"

"Who told you he was the Highland chieftain you call him?" demanded Gordon idly

"Again, my ears!" returned Esmé, with the men

drawing bridle before the quadrangle of the Argyle Lodging, where to-day the aspect of foam-flecked horsemen would be sufficient passport

The new-comers were ushered into my lord's very cabinet. The transit, short as it was, had chafed the Cavalier's impatience, he advanced abruptly on the gladd-eyed Marquess holding conference with Lorn seated on a corner of a writing-table, neither sparing a glance for the woman drumming her fingers with an air of sullen expectation against the mauve window-pane in a recess

"My lord, I come to demand intervention of the Parliament for my wife, imprisoned on false suspicion of witchcraft in the Tolbooth!" Gordon said without preface

The expectation kindled by his entrance died slowly out of his hearers' faces, only Jean Gordon's fingers ceasing from their restlessness, as though interest in the matter were but first aroused in her. Argyle spoke courteously

"Yon is a sore heaving, sir. By whom and where was your dame delated?"

"By those who, accusing Major Weir of Embro', her guardian, of witchcraft, made it guilt of her to be found in his household of the West Bow"

At the brief answer Argyle's eyelids quivered, his brows knit thoughtfully. Lord Lorn interposed a question

"How was your lady named before marriage, sir?"

"Chrystal Hope of Clear Havens"

At the name a look stole between father and son. Argyle falling to fingering his chin

"A heavy business!" he said nervously. "You have witnesses doubtless to confront against those who lay this charge at your lady's door?"

"Skewer me! sir, there are none such!" Esmé burst in. "The lass was hustled into the Tolbooth by the mob out under their Blue Blanket, on a word squinting at her from a minister who professes to hold the confession of Major Weir"

"Your pardon for interruption, sir, but perhaps

it were well I should audit these reckonings," put in Lorn smoothly. He drew a pile of account-books towards him. "The comptroller of the household grows careless, the matter of King's Butter alone is ruinous!"

At the words pronounced with a studious lack of emphasis, the woman in the window shifted slightly, standing thereafter in a position to dart quick side-long looks towards the four men grouped about the writing-table. With the indecisive hand going out to an inkstand, Argyle withdrew it.

"You are right, my son. I would remind you, sirs," he turned to the others, "that a minister's word is, in these days, ill to controvene, the Kirk being, as Lesley's miscarriage with the army had testified, the strongest party in Scotland."

"At least my Lord Argyle has power to insist on postponement of the trial," exclaimed Gordon sharply. "A particular examination will establish my wife's innocence, she is but involved in the excitement over Major Weir."

"Major Weir? Yon was the Town Guard captain who ordered all for Montrose his execution?" queried Lorn in careless parenthesis. "Judgment in his case, methinks, is no more than justice!" He bent again over his accounts. "*The comptroller needs to look to himself,*" he murmured. "*On his underling's testimony, he will be brought in guilty of all the misrule!*"

The alacrity with which Argyle had a second time drawn the inkstand nearer, was naimed again.

"Witchcraft is a charge ill to meddle with!" he fenced. "I vow this is no time for a riot under the Blue Blanket, such as would burst out did I come between the law and Major Weir."

"Let Major Weir go to the devil, sir, seeing he has chosen the road, but save my wife!"

"*Best make a clean sweep, and leave none in the servants' hall to make mischief!*" muttered Lorn. Argyle pushed the standish from him with an air of finality.

"Fie, sir, would you have me deliver Scotland

to the enemy, as I should do did I turn people and Kirk against me ' " he exclaimed " You Royalists wax overbold, but I will not be driven by you to action which would bring down the clouds big, God knows, with storm, on my own head ' " Yet, " he qualified, " if money or prayers "—

" I fear a depreciated currency in both for my Lord Argyle ' " interrupted Gordon brusquely He strode from the room, leaving Argyle's forehead frown-furrowed

" This is no good hour to disoblige a Royalist, son Archibald ' " he murmured perplexedly " Could the girl but be saved—but my stirring in the matter would bring suspicion we could ill afford on us The lass and Major Weir and James Grahame,—I would I had put no finger to the whole tangled pun, the matter lies heavy enough already on my conscience ' "

The hoyden laugh of Lady Jean interrupted the petulant outburst She drew her skirts of white brocade round her, and turned on the men with a scornful mouth

" Conscience ' yon's style and title for a fear of consequences, uncle ' " she gibed " Your wisdom has averted such from you, so kill your conscience, and if you must confess, let it be to Heaven rather than men,—for the former will tell no tales ' "

The scornful outcry came faintly to Gordon's ears, as, Esmé at heel, he crossed the anteroom A certain resemblance had come to the countenances of the two men, a dogged recklessness in the looks with which they confronted the world, the look of those who see the way of their death plain before them Head up, they freed the staircase with the same air of resolute haste on each, but they were no more than midway in the great hall before a panel, slidden back, disclosed the morose visage of Dandy Jock

" A bonny embassy for a bridegroom to play go-between to his wedded wife and her gallant ' " he protested sulkily, offering a billet to Gordon " May I never wear lace more (though now shall I have

some worth the wearing ') if I would not the missive was to say that the dame who was *on* with the new love so cleverly was in sooth *off* with the old ' I vow she need fear small pursuit ' "

A flash scintillated in the eyes bent on the scrap of paper Gordon had unfolded Three words, no more, were scrawled across it—*Cromwell has daughters* !

Dandy had vanished when the face bent over the paper was raised Resolve was still in the set lips, but a hope blazed in the eyes that a few moments before had seen no other prospect than a death with a doomed wife

"To horse, Hope ! Still a throw remains ! "

The sentence with the ring in it brought a flash into the other's moody eyes, but Gordon had crossed his horse and was launched through the great gateway already The sparks flew under the hoofs scorning the steep streets, but with the gates passed Adam drew his beast into hand

"Steady has it ! " he observed to Esmé, ranging alongside "If it's possible, we must be in Embro' before the shutting of the ports ! "

The Hope threw a quick discontented look at the face from which the wind blew back the auburn locks

"By the seeming, my Buird Ellen may graze the roadway clear of grass between here and there ! The plan that means Chrystal's saving is yours ! "

"It takes two, friend ! " Gordon responded "For him I seek in Embro' to-night is Cromwell's self ! "

"English Noll ? "

"No other "

"May my bonnet cover an ass' head, but I can give no guess at your plan ! "

"It is to conjure him for the sake of his daughters—report has it he loves them well—to intervene for a further trial of Chrystal ! "

"What ! he will dare the mob ? "

"It can but be tried "

"What pledge have you for him of good faith ? "

"Myself!"

The beat of the steadily galloping feet set a period With the world flowing backward past the riders, Gordon turned his glinting smile on Esmé

"Do you see the place of the second man?" he asked "With myself hostage to Cromwell, I would fain—I must know a strong man at Chrystal's side, between her and harm"

"To hold her safe for you?" Esme's laugh rang like a curse

The galloping hoofs alone broke the silence that closed in on Gordon's nod Steadily the drumming hoofs laid the road behind them, an occasional snatch at the bridle witnessing to the horses' eagerness The wives spreading the webs to bleach on Larbert green were agape for the men who rode so fast, before the Hope broke his brooding pause

"Hornie patch his breeches with the skin o' me! To trust a chiel to warden the lass he loves for another man"—

"As I trust you!" Gordon finished coolly A flash passed across Esme's wine-marred face

"I'll ride and I'll ride and I'll ride!" he shouted, his heel at work "To Embro' gates at least Esmé Hope is with you, brother, and the lass two men love beyond them!"

Tacitly accepting the strange alliance, Gordon galloped steadily River Teith, turbid with autumn rains, came up to the girths when the horses were for fording it, but they swam out gallantly Gordon husbanded the chestnut for which Lady Jean had thought to provide another rider, but the mare between Esmé's knees seemed to gain a wind with every stage, laying herself ardently forward

"Burd Ellen and Chrystal were aye chief!" the Hope commented "It was a slice o' luck that I knew the airt where Master Weir was wont to stable her, and I needing the fleetest bit of horse-flesh in Embro' town"

Such talk as there was was fragmentary, throwing curious illuminations on the past That Esmé in

petulant disdain of personal safety had turned back from Cawdion Woods to Edinburgh to secure at least his revenge on Tod Sandy, was plain to Gordon, though the Hope was unusually reticent in his mood. A bucket of slocken for the animals and a tankard of wine for the men had been snatched at Carron, but Linlithgow chimneys smoked for supper unheeded when the riders went through it, for the level autumn sun was transfiguring a red-fruited rowan by the roadside into a tree of rubies against the blue-green of the western sky, and the tree was of no great growth.

The sun was lower yet when the horses plunged into a wood with many paths running up among the trees. The wind was rising, whispering of coming disaster in vague prophecy through the tree-tops that whispered after it, as the junketers of old may have repeated the words blazoned by the Hand upon the wall of their banqueting-room, of doom that should knock upon the palace-doors with the dawn. The horses' hoofs went muffled through the shrivelled leaves, heaped, like memories of the past, beneath the branches once gay with their green life, the trees stood up haggard in the dusk that was the day of the wood, the dusk of the world outside here accentuated premature night. The darkening and the Cassandra voices of wood and wind fell heavily on the riders, each involuntarily pressing his beast with knee and heel, though the hands on the bridles needed to be restraining, to turn and wheel among the stark tree-boles. They made good way, but the day passing from them would not be overtaken, when the men who raced the night left the wood behind a blaze of light in the west alone remained to show that the sun had gone that way.

The hands on the bridles grew urgent then, the horses were let out at speed. Along the highway they thundered, the riders sitting them making little of having kept the saddle over the same road twice in the last four-and-twenty hours. Neck to neck the horses strove gamely, though their wide

red nostrils showed that the last ounce of pace had been put on. Yet they galloped, and their masters' eyes searched the darkness for token of Edinburgh town.

They had hurled themselves thus through the darkness for long, when a gasp broke from Gordon, through the noise of floundering hoofs and the breathing of hard-ridden horses. Far in front across the miles, lights glimmered to them, the lights of the castle.

An oath from Esmé, followed by a thud to right and left, waked careless question.

"What do you?"

"Lightening the ship by a pair of jackboots, brother!" returned the Hope, settling his stockinged feet in the stirrups. "Burd Ellen is good enough to be worshipped, yet she is but mortal, to have ridden it out from Embro' and back again is over hard even for such a bit of blood as she!"

The lights were nearer, brighter, when Burd Ellen's rider threw his heavy cloak from him. The mare's gallop was feat no longer, she had stumbled twice. Gordon glanced round, to see Esme leap to the ground.

"Od, man, never wait!" the latter shouted. "I will but cut the girths, for, rat me! the choice lies between the horse and the saddle!"

The momentary breathing-space stood to the mare, catching up presently.

"The frost bites cold!" cried Gordon, seeing by the starlight her rider in shirt and hose.

The Hope patted the warm wet neck under his hand.

"'Tis for Chrystal, lass, for Chrystal!" he encouraged, and looked again at the lights, nearer, brighter yet.

Other lights had come to company with them when the men, husbanding the coughing horses, ceased to spur. In the gurdy air the flames of many watch-fires wavered to and fro, a figure seemingly risen out of the ground grasped the rein hard by Burd Ellen's cheek.

"Who goes there?" he challenged.

"One to speak with General Cromwell, and that instantly!" Gordon to his right responded. The outpost sentry shook his head.

"The word, if you have it."

Gordon's chestnut edged forward, but the picket held the ground. The chink of gold filled the pause.

"Lead me under escort if you will, but I must to your General. My matter is urgent."

"Put up your gold, master, since it is the price of a hanging to the man who breaks camp-rules!" the soldier declared. "The Lord-General sets forth for Linlithgow to-morrow, and would be ill-pleased were he broken in on in the night when no man can work! With the day honest men who have honest business in the town can pass the ports, but, like those in Scripture, they are shut to him who fares late!"

With teeth shut proudly on the oath that might have signalled a triumph for a pragmatist enemy, the Cavalier drew his horse aside to speak in a low tone to Esmé.

"They have grown stiffer within the last days. Had it been otherwise, we might have won through to yon house we wot of and no questions asked, but since the fires in Holyrood this mushroom camp has sprung up! There's nothing for it but patience, you at least holding yourself ready for a dash through the gates at their opening."

A spurt of the nearest flame showed the Hope's odd smile.

"We both have ridden in the race, but one man wins the prize!" he said in a strange voice. In the red light Gordon scanned him narrowly, vaguely disquieted over the reckless spark that had come to glimmer in the blue eyes.

"The prize I rode for is Chrystal's safety!" he returned. "Without Cromwell's intervention I cannot compass it, but she will scarce owe thanks to him who should keep her from harm at the price of her honour!"

"Thanks are bidden wage! A kiss from sweet

lips, willing or unwilling, would outweigh them to my mind!" Esmé laughed bitterly "Were it not your wisest, brother, by a word to yonder guard to have me laid by the heels as a bold breaker-out of the Tolbooth?"

Gordon shrugged his shoulders, unclasping his own cloak

"Put this mantle about you, man!" he said in his brusque fashion "You will scarce serve the lass by freezing through an October night"

Waiting on no reply, he moved his horse towards the men clustered about the watch-fire, to make a curt demand for the guardhouse The soldiers responded civilly enough, two of them escorting him to the building allotted for the purpose, where, in spite of sleepless nights previous, Gordon fell to pacing the night away Up and down through the room assigned to him he went, walking quickly with clenched hands and bent head, raised only at intervals to cast a glance through the curtainless window at the light, longed-for and dreaded with almost equal fierceness

The light was still no more than a palpitation of the darkness when Brackley stayed in his agonised walk Far away his ear had caught the sound of bridled horses approaching from the town A stride brought him to the door, where the guard was turning-out under an officer, with a sour look for Gordon's lovelock

"I request to be conducted to your General, sir, on a matter of life and death!"

A gasp in his throat roughened the Cavalier's voice Across his sight, the mare which had ridden yesterday away beside him, struck in swift vision, bearing her rider headlong on the ports Breeding kept the face set in the objectionable chestnut locks composed, but Gordon's singing ears heard nothing of the Puritan's questions, the soldiers standing to their arms cast curious glances at him

His senses dizzied like the rushing of a flood when they revived in him, at the nearing of the hoofs descending from the town With the first glance

flung, Gordon recognised the man who held Chrystal's fate in his hand,—a bulky, somewhat slovenly figure, sitting his horse with an air partaking rather of the farmer than the soldier

The officer of the guard had saluted and stepped forward to the great man's stirrup. His nasal voice was in the first words of an explanation when Gordon interposed, thrusting those in his way aside. A scornful light glimmered in his eyes as the man to whom he came seemed to brace himself where he sat, carrying his hand to his holster. With a slight bow Gordon drew his sword, and let it fall to the ground.

"You have divined me an enemy, sir!" he said abruptly. "Yet when a woman's in danger, even enemies may fight shoulder to shoulder, and it is such alliance I ask of you to-day!"

At the ring in the polished voice and the fearless glance, the slight apprehension that told of nerves at perpetual tension, relaxed in Cromwell's attitude. Eyes in a reddish face scrutinised watchfully.

"Who is this woman you speak of?" he asked with provincial bluntness.

"My wife, sir, known by her maiden-name of Chrystal Hope, and arrested on false suspicion of witchcraft, together with one Major Weir and his sister of the West Bow."

"And who are you yourself, prithee?" demanded Cromwell.

"Adam Gordon of Brackley."

At the name a recollection passed into Cromwell's face. His eyes grew more intense in their scrutiny, but Gordon supported them calmly, not yielding a foot when the General suddenly pressed his horse upon him.

"You are a Malignant?"

"So the Roundheads call us Royalists, I believe, sir," responded Adam. A curious gleam came into the eyes regarding him.

"You are bold to come to me!"

"Any port in a storm!" Gordon smiled slightly.

"You alone in Embro' to-day are strong enough to dare the mob by rescuing my wife from the blind fury which would confound the innocent with the guilty Her innocence can be proved, I ask but for time to do it "

The penetrative glance on him endured

"What pledge have you that this is no pretext to involve me in a mob-rising while your party besets me from without ? " demanded Cromwell sharply

"Myself "

With the word, Gordon's self-possession deserted him He grasped at the buff sleeve of him in the saddle

"God ' man, we waste time ! " he cried "You hold me, send a bullet through my heart at the first sign of my ill-faith, but save the lass—as you hope for salvation hereafter for the lass-bairns begotten of yourself ! "

At a sign from Cromwell his guard had fallen out of earshot, forming a wide circle A second gesture was answered by the instant forming up of a company, hard-bitten veterans

"I take Almighty witness that I am not greedy of human blood ! " Cromwell leant from the horse, sending his sedate voice into Gordon's ear "The Ironsides of Naseby and Edgehill will, under grace, rate the Embro' mob, turbulence notwithstanding, from the prey you are for saving—but it lies with you to pay the price of hire ! " He looked steadily at the other "And the price is—the whereabouts of those baubles men call the Regalia ! "

Gordon whitened, meeting full the look imposed on him

"The price is too much ! " he said slowly

"Jest not with me, sir You are he who took them from the keeping of the Parliament ! "

"I do not deny it' But if you would know more, you must ask it of such a spy and traitor as told you so much already, for I am not of his brand ! "

Cromwell's look did not move from the challenge of the eyes burning in Gordon's ashen face.

"I protest I am no huckster to chaffer with you, sir," he said coldly "This is your last word?"

The devil Expediency, spawned of circumstance, was whispering in Gordon's soul. The Honours were no longer in the house of the Flodden-Wall, they would be sped back to the safe-keeping of Dunnottar—insured by its first rifling from further suspicion of the English—after they had played their part in the coronation which, by Argyle's admission, the King's Start, fiasco otherwise, had made a mere question of weeks. Meanwhile a word of the house with its double entrance would save Chrystal's life.

"This is your last word?"

Devil Expediency had changed his shape. He masked as man's duty, woman's love, he whispered of sweet lips, a warm bosom.

"Your last word?"

The temptation had taken on his final guise, the vizard of self-sacrifice. He sneered at a pharisaical wardening of honour, he sang of renunciation of all for another's sake.

"My last word, so help me God!"

Gordon's answer struggled hoarsely through a labouring chest. For a long moment the two men measured each other, then Cromwell gave the signal to march. Officers and sergeants quadrupled it, joint by joint the great military machine stirred into motion. With its passing from him, Gordon swung on his heel, setting face grimly for the ports.

"Why tarry the wheels of your chariot, sir?"

The provincially-accented voice struck sharply on the ears of the man accepting his lot of a baffled hope with the superb courage of good blood. Gordon's look had never been haughtier as he glanced over his shoulder at the Puritan General restraining his fretting horse in the bustle about him.

"They were clogged with a belief that one with Christianity ever on his lips was bound to keep some small portion in his heart, but they have left that creed in the mud!" he rejoined.

"I protest, a valiant man, a very valiant man!"

The exclamation startled Gordon into standing still. The batch of Ironsides, previously fallen-out, were marshalling compactly, their captain advancing to the General's rein.

"These will go up with you to Ramoth-Gilead, sir!" Cromwell said abruptly. "By the test practised on you but now, you are of a single eye, he who is faithful in a little, shall be placed over five cities! Corporal Fear-and-Quake, here, will hold himself and the troop under your guidance, and bring off the damsel from the horn of the unicorn to safe keeping in my quarters in the Moray House!"

He turned his horse, leaving Gordon dazed with the swing of Fortune's wheel. The officer whose Scriptural name was belied by the set of his stern bronzed face, had already told off a man to bring up the Cavalier's chestnut, in a trice the rescue-party was moving on the Watergate. Fear-and-Quake nodded his cropped head once or twice as they passed within the barrier.

"Armageddon!" he observed sententiously.

The steep slope of the Canongate had grown living with the multitude abroad. The soldiers made way tardily, the swirling current of the silent hurrying folk surging under the very hoofs, dammed for instants together by incursions on each hand from close or wynd. The current swept on and up towards the Tolbooth, as though drawn thither by some silent suction, to shatter thereafter in a burst of resistless fury.

The soldiers made difficult passage. Hemmed in the vault of the Nether Bow Port, glances keen as swords were aimed at them, salvoes of whispers saluted their ears.

"The southrons! Will they be for rough-riding and brow-beating the power o' the Kirk?"

"Hoots, Cromwell's no' the chield to gung a bees' byke aboot's head yon gate! I doubt he has ta'en himself till Linlithgow to be out o' the ministers' road and the work o' this day!"

"Up wi' the Blue Blanket, gien they dare hinder the sentence o' the Presbytery!"

Fear-and-Quake loosened the pistols in his holster, "Armageddon!" he muttered with a well-pleased smile

The great door of St Giles was abreast with the soldiers when the current in front surged back in a wave, met by an opposing stream from the east. Like flotsam in the flood, broken outcries floated here and there

"The ministers down in the Parliament House are warstling wi' the lass, if at the last a testimony might be won from her anent the witches. Dooms! they bude to have their fill of her stiffness yesterday!"

"Ay, the candidate-laddie lodging in the land west o' us, testified that after five hours' catechising she cried out like a queen, defying them by threat or promise to make her play the traitor to one to whom she owed salt to!"

"The sight o' the fire will mak' the quean see the thing in another light, I'll wad! But yestere'en the word was that Master Samuel Rutherford daied the Commission to touch a lass he would uphold, quo' he, innocent as his own wean!"

"Ay did he, but he rode last night in haste from Embro', on a word o' the heavy sickness o's wife I'se gar the jade will rue't!"

The swirling eddy was about the horses, forcing them to a halt. Gordon's sword was out, the gesture waking a gleam in Fear-and-Quake's eyes

"Do what is in thy heart!" muttered that militant Christian. "The hour is at hand!"

The crowd about the Parliament House had broken into surf, eager striving-forward relentlessly pressed-back. Voices, a confused medley, gave tongue to the accelerated excitement

"She comes! she comes! The witchling to the fire, to the hanging!"

"Forward! Charge!"

Fear-and-Quake's voice in metallic command was responded to by spurs plunged rowel-deep. Gordon, ahead, was engulfed in the throng, his saddle gave him vantage, he saw

A girl, white as a shroud, faced the people itching for her blood. Her prison-escort of the Town Guard visibly shrank from the threatening hands and faces, but Chrystal of Clear Havens showed brave front.

Men, shrieking curses, went down under Gordon's horse, as he broke road to the figure stretching out her arms in wild, incredulous glad appeal. Yet he was a horse-length from her when an arm with a knife in the fist was shaken above heads.

"Shall the witch go scot-free?" cried the voice of a fanatic.

Gordon was at the goal, but the arm had struck. A jet of blood answered the knife as it fell—the blood of a man flinging himself between the girl and death.

Like chaff under the flail, the throng scattered before the Ironsides' charge. The rider who had led them was out of the saddle, bending, with the wife he had ridden to save, over the man who had been before him.

"Eh, Esmé Esme lad!"

At the sob in Chrystal's voice, the fast-glazing eyes opened. The Town Guard was clamouring around, but Gordon waved them sharply back as the Hope, each breath bought by blood, spoke feebly.

"I've had my paiks, I'm thinking," he murmured. "Sandy and Dandy and Dare-the-Deil, the last o' the cleckin is out of the road, and none to come between wee Chrystal and the man she loves! Give me your hand, lass, for it grows unco dark, and there's an ill bit o' the moss hereaway that's some sore to cross!"

"Esmé, Esme, stay!"

The entreaty had no power to lift the heavy eyelids. At Gordon's sign, the girl, weeping frankly as a sister, leant lower, her lips, warm and quivering, touched the face that was growing cold. The blue eyes opened then with a flash of their reckless triumph.

"I got that kiss—though blood flowed!"

The blue eyes were open still, but the light in them had been put out.

They saw nothing of the Ironsides closing up shoulder to shoulder round that incongruous figure of the Cavalier with the girl, snowdrop white, in his clasp. Bared partisans and faces that looked dangerous as gun-barrels cowed the crowd, emissaries from the Kantore—who had heavier work that day than further dispute over a girl against whom it was, Pilate-like, conscious nothing could be proved to exist, were already leavening the inert masses. As Chrystal, in her husband's arms, was borne in the midst of her rescuers, a sullen heave of excitement swept the multitude on the Tolbooth.

The press was round the horsemen, and they ceased to resist, infected themselves also by the stenuous expectation in the folk. The Puritans, to whom the Apocalypse was as a newsletter of the day, grew grave as at unsealing of a vial of Divine Wrath over those visibly branded slaves of World-Wickedness, only Gordon and Chrystal, looking in each other's eyes, forgot the throng of grim faces watching for coming judgment.

"My gallant of the moor—at last!"

"Esmé bought our happiness with his life. Bonnybell, he loved you and died for you like a man!"

A tender pity flooded the grey eyes.

"Eh, had he never seen me!"

"He had never been so much of a man! Better such death in prime, than long life like *his* yonder!"

At Gordon's gesture towards the black prison-house, Chrystal shrank and shuddered. The thrill brought his look to the flower-pale face, he gazed at it with a reverence. With love's selfishness, the world went wiped out for them.

"What you have endured, those shadows round dear eyes and lips tell me! Love Chrystal, life will be too short to thank you for what you have dared for me! From now on we will face our parlous times together!"

"Together! The world's a spell to turn rough to smooth!"

A great roar, the voice of the cataract in its leap, shook the lovers from their absorption.

"The witches to us ! None shall force them from us ! They have confessed !"

"Nay, the woman Grizel only !" contradicted an austere-looking person, schoolmaster by the fringed ends of a leathern taws peeping ominously from a pocket. "She avows herself witch as was their mother before her, and owns her brother's familiar was his black staff, the whilk counselled him to his nefarious and abominable doings. She speaks also of a fiery coach many years before driven to their door in the West Bow in broad day, into which they were invited of a stranger and driven to a coeven at Dalkeith, where they were baptized into the army of witches, in an idolatrous ceremony named of her the Black Mass !"

"The West Bow has long enough kent Mad Grizel." A woman's voice, sharp with despairing protest, was uplifted. "It cannot be that the testimony of a Bedlamite suffices to destroy such a one as Angelical Thomas !"

The schoolmaster swelled with offended importance.

"Him whom your presumptuous blasphemy terms Angelical Thomas has been sentenced to his just deserts on his own confession, taken down by the godly and faithful minister of Ormiston, who had for long set a watch on him as one worthy o' suspicion !"

"Haith, maybe Apostle Paul might have bettered his text 'Confess your faut's one to another,' had he added 'but tak' tent o' ministers !'" observed the woman hardily. "The pulpit makes him within it more or less of a man according to the way he takes his stand, and it's less for such as him Ormiston parishes rejoices under, since it lifts those above the rules o' right 'at guide the lave o' us ! Trapped in confession ! the trick was worthy of Master John Sinclair, minister o' Ormiston !"

"You speak as the foolish women !" retorted her opponent. "More than his confession condemns Major Weir, corpses murdered by him have been found in his dwelling !"

"The red-headed stranger ? Eh, man, did the dead speak to tell who murdered him ?"

The schoolmaster cleared his throat portentously.

"The dead body of a female child has been sworn to by many of the parish as being that of an orphan of one of Lesley's army. The warlock Weir took the lassie home to himself, but being stricken with sickness, is reputed to have sought the virtue of her blood, forbye having"—

The plainness of a plain-spoken age struck the colour from the face of the last one seeking to hold a brief for Angelical Thomas. She shrunk.

"And she a bairn !" she murmured. "And he—Major Weir !"

The name that was an elegy stayed half-spoken on her lips. With a rending creak the doors of the Tolbooth were opening.

The stones of the High Street seemed to have cried out, so great was the yell that saluted the lurid figures of the Guard advancing with the grey-haired woman in their midst. Chrystal, in sight, though not in hearing, would fain have broken through to bid the friendless creature take courage, but something of the upliftedness of her second sight seemed to linger on Grizel Weir, she walked almost eagerly, and though she walked alone, she spoke as to a presence at her side.

"Through the fire, father ! Through the fire and to ye beyond !" she reiterated. "Eh, to think your Grizel has found the road at last !"

The voiced hatred about her appeared to trouble her. She stretched out her hands appealingly.

"Good people, do not ill-wish me ! I ken I am some fyled wi' the dust of the spinning, but the day's task's by, and 'tis my vestments only are drumly ! Skreigh not thus, and I will lay them aside"—

With piteous frenzy she plucked at her garments, barely restrained from tearing them off by the efforts of her guards. The pathos of the action was lost on the witnesses, the perception dim in the clouded brain of a riddance from stains of sin bred of cir-

cumstance, not of free-will, was reckoned by the vulgar as the shamelessness of the witch

Baulked, forced forward towards the gallows in the Grassmarket, Grizel ceased to strive. She broke into a run down the steepness of the Bow

"Through the fire, father, and then home!" she said again. "Let us hasten, for Grizel thinks long to be wi' ye!"

A silence had fallen on the people, but it was not at her prayer. Few followed the distraught sister vanishing in the windings of the Bow, for a strong company was making exit from the Tolbooth, and they compassed the familiar form of Major Weir.

The dark face was set, and the secret man walked with his brooding look. His steps supported by the black staff that should share its master's doom of fire, he came on, and the minister of Ormiston kept pace at his elbow.

"Pray, my sinful brother, pray!" he bade him stridently, at each repetition looking about upon the crowd, as though challenging them to note his efforts for a rival's soul.

"Pray, ere it be too late!"

The procession with its satellite throng was setting face for the lands between Edinburgh and Leith, the doomed brother and sister divided in their death. Major Weir stopped suddenly, sending his black look like a blow upon the Jealousy at his side. The shriek of an anguished soul rent the air.

"Torment me no more! I am tormented already!"

Onward still, but the minister of Ormiston had slunk from sight. Major Weir walked alone.

They had come to the edge of a green valley, and the road was done. The fire kindled on the Gallows-lea had burnt fast in the wind from the Forth, there was delay in fetching fresh faggots. Once more Major Weir lifted up his eyes, he looked steadily towards the town which had known him Saint, towards the townsfolk who knew him Hypocrite. Somewhere in the mists beneath the scarped castle-

rock lay the house that had been his Aceldama. against the blue sky the steeple of the Tron lifted itself above the church in which Angelical Thomas had sat in the seat of the godly

A shifting of those around brought his look back. A man, cord in hand, had stepped behind him, no muscle of the dark face quivered as Major Weir felt the noose about his throat. It was then that the woman, who had once prophesied a chariot of fire for one deemed saint by her, pressed forward, swept by a wave of great pity to the feet of the man in his throes.

"Eh, Major Weir!" she besought passionately, "say but once—Lord, be merciful to me!"

With a groan that held more anguish than sobs or tears, Major Weir spoke for the last time.

"I have lived like a beast—I must die as a beast!"

The noose tightened, shutting the man into his self-chosen silence. Major Weir passed out into the dark.

THE END

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